

When tomorrow comes

“If you judge others how this system has judged you, it will make you no better than those who have condemned you to death.” Dwight Adanandus

THEMES



HUMAN SECURITY



MEDIA



PEACE AND VIOLENCE

COMPLEXITY



LEVEL 3

GROUP SIZE



ANY

TIME



60 MINUTES

Themes Human Security, Media, Peace and Violence

Complexity Level 3

Group size Any

Time 60 minutes

Overview This activity uses information sheets and discussion to explore issues about:

- The rights of criminals
- The death penalty
- The protection of society from criminals

Related rights

- The right to life
- The right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment

Objectives

- To examine our preconceptions about criminals and reflect on some of the implications of the death penalty
- To be aware of our own listening skills and how we “interpret” information we are given
- To promote a sense of human dignity and justice.

Materials

- Copies of the handout “When tomorrow comes”; one per participant.
- A sheet of paper and pencil for each member of the group.

Instructions

Step 1.

1. Read part 1 of *When tomorrow comes* out loud to the group. When you have finished, give people about 5 minutes to recall all the main points and to write them down in their own words. Then ask them to exchange sheets of paper with their neighbour, to read each other’s accounts and give feedback.
2. Invite some volunteers to read out their accounts. Then discuss the differences between the versions: did some people remember more details than others did? Did some people invent details that had not been mentioned in the original story?
3. Ask people for their reaction to the story: who do they think the narrator is? What has happened?

Step 2.

1. Read out the newspaper cutting and part 2 of Dwight’s narration.
2. Now allow the pairs 10-15 minutes to discuss the new information with their partners. Supply them with copies of “When tomorrow comes” in case they want to refer back to points in the text.

3. Then ask them to think about the following two issues:
 - Did they find their opinion of either Dwight or Nanon changed when they learnt that they were on Death Row? How? Why?
 - What do they think Dwight meant by saying ‘If you judge others how this system has judged you, it will make you no better than those who have condemned you to death!’ Do they agree with him?
4. Open the issue up for general discussion, obtaining feedback from the various pairs on these questions.

Debriefing and evaluation

This activity can be used to spark off a number of important and interesting issues which can form the subject of further activities or discussion. However, it is recommended that in the debriefing you stick fairly closely to the topics that the groups have already considered rather than opening up entirely new themes (see below, under notes for facilitators).

- Has this activity taught you anything about yourself? Has it made you reconsider any of your previous opinions or beliefs?
- What do you think the activity was intended to illustrate? Did it succeed in this aim, and if not, why not?
- What, if anything, did the activity have to say to you about the right to life? Were there any other rights issues that were raised in the discussion?

Make a note of these issues on a large sheet of paper or flipchart paper for future use.

Tips for facilitators

In the first discussion (after reading part I) it is important not to give people any hint of the two men’s situation: try to draw out people’s impressions of the characters, but without suggesting you have any particular reason for doing so. The purpose is for people to examine the two men’s human sides, without knowing anything of their circumstances or past history.

The point of people swapping accounts at the end of step I is to give them an idea of the different ways that people may perceive and remember exactly the same piece of information. It is worth emphasising that this should not be seen as a “test”, so that people do not feel shy about their accounts; but rather as a way of showing up different viewpoints. Try to ask for comments from people whose account has differed radically from their neighbour’s. Ask why this may have been the case – why, for example, some people remembered certain pieces of information that were omitted by others.

The activity itself will most probably raise too many issues for a single session, so you should try to keep the discussion along the lines suggested, rather than allowing people to get carried away by debating – for example – the death penalty itself. Try to keep the discussion focused on the two key issues of:

1. The extent to which we, the State, everyone, are inclined to “judge” people on the basis of something (we believe) they have done. This is probably what Dwight has in mind when he talks about not “judging” others as the State has judged him (and Nanon). The State has effectively written them off as human beings on the basis of something (it believes) they have done in the past.
2. Even so-called “hardened criminals” possess and retain their inherently human

Key date

26 June

International Day in
Support of Victims of
Torture

characteristics - not only the “caring and compassion” of which Dwight speaks, but also the “frustration and depression” that Nanon describes as a result of the confinement.

When discussing the “right to life” issue, guide the discussion around the issues of whether these two people can be said still to possess the right to life – and if not, how someone can “lose” such a right. Does anyone, for example, have the authority to remove that right from other citizens, even if they have committed a crime?

Suggestions for follow-up

Pursue the issues raised at the end of the activity. Organise a formal debate or use the method “Electioneering”, on page 127. Topics may include:

- Punishment issues: what is the purpose of locking criminals up and/or of executing them? Is it primarily to protect society, to alter the behaviour of the criminals, or is it revenge/ retribution?
- The death penalty: what are the arguments for and against the death penalty?
- The security of the nation vs. security of the individual: what are the limits to the way a government may treat its worst criminals or terrorists? For example - can torture of an individual justified on the grounds of “security of the nation”?

Take a look at Nanon’s own website, <http://home4.inet.tele.dk/lepan/lene/nanon.htm>
Songs have always been a powerful tool in people’s fight for rights.

Ideas for action

Visit the web site of the Canadian Coalition Against the Death Penalty (CCADP) and read more of the prisoners’ writings (www.ccadp.org). Then write to someone on Death Row (the ccadp website contains information on how to become a pen-pal or contact your local association of Amnesty International).

Note: the full piece (*When tomorrow comes*) can be found at the CCADP web site.

HANDOUTS

When tomorrow comes, by Nanon Williams

Part 1

“It was a day after Dwight Adanandus died when I truly looked at life completely differently than what it was, or shall I say, what I wished it to be. This was the beginning of winter, and as I lay still thinking of a friend that always presented a smile when the days seemed so redundant, I felt tormented. As I gently moved, picking up the newspaper under the door, the paper told his story.

Reading about it and knowing I would never see him again felt like someone was sticking pincushions in my heart over and over again. Sometimes he would come swinging into the yard yelling, ‘What’s up youngster?’ And I would look around me, stare back, and say, ‘Man, who you calling a youngster,’ and we would both start laughing because I was the youngest person on our block. And when I think of those moments now, well, it deeply saddens me, because I’ll never look forward to being in the yard without Dwight being around to break the creases that riddled my face with anger.

As the years have gone by, my methods of passing time has changed, but I like to think these new methods will hopefully make me become a better man one day like Dwight became. During my moments of weakness, I always find myself wondering what Dwight would have done.

‘Remember,’ he would say to me, ‘The system can only get to you if you let them. Make your peace with whoever your God is and start to live life the best you can and appreciate it.’ Then he would continue, ‘Youngster, I don’t know why you’re here, but I know you don’t belong here...’

Part 2

‘..... In fact, no one belongs here, not on death row. You have rapists, kidnappers, robbers, child molesters and sadistic people who don’t give a damn about you. However, you also have caring and compassionate people who have done those very same things, but have found a way to change and I want you to always remember that,’ he said to me weeks before he was executed. ‘Remember this if nothing else. If you judge others how this system has judged you, it will make you no better than those who have condemned you to death!’ And as those words ring in my ears now, I wonder why it has taken me so long to understand what he meant. Of course I heard what he said and it made sense, but making sense and fully grasping the meaning of those words was something totally different. I guess then I was the youngster he called me, but the truth hurts when you finally take the time to see it.

I know the confinement is all a psychological weapon of torture that builds frustration until depression sets in, but somehow the spirit and the will to continue remains in a few. For Dwight, he had that spirit no matter what he did that placed him on death row and with that spirit he changed other’s lives who rot like living corpse in the system’s graveyard. ‘I know it’s not easy Youngster,’ he would say. ‘But nobody said life was easy. Take each day for what it’s worth and as long as you can see a light at the end of the road, let that be the strength that guides you,’ were the last words he ever said to me tearfully as he said his final good-byes. I dare not to explain what that means to me, as I guess he said it to me so I can find my own strength that sustains me through the years that have passed and probably the years to come. I have never forsaken my principles or the things that I value most in life — like my family, so more than likely that love and one day entering heavens gates, is what tomorrow really is when it comes.”

Nanon Williams was sentenced to death by the State of Texas when he was 17 years old, under the charge of capital murder. He denies the charge and has spent the last nine years on Death Row.

Source: www.ccadp.org.

Newspaper cutting

Huntsville - October 2, 1997. A convicted robber was executed Wednesday night for gunning down a San Antonio businessman who tried to stop him from fleeing a bank hold-up nine years ago. Adanandus, 41, went to death row for killing Vernon Hanan, who was shot in the chest January 28, 1988, as he wrestled with Adanandus in the foyer of a bank on San Antonio’s north side.