**Right Choice or Wrong**

**Learning about Thinking**

To make any decision, a person must first identify the alternatives, determine the pros and cons of each alternative, predict the consequences of each, and determine criteria to evaluate each. Some decisions, such as what kind of car to buy, can be made purely on the basis of which alterative is most practical, useful, and beneficial. **Moral decision making**, however, is more complex because it involves evaluating whether the choices are moral or immoral. A person must use his or her own system of moral values to decide which options are right and wrong.

**Thinking About the Play**

In Act Four, John Proctor must make a moral decision that will have profound consequences both for himself and others.

**A.** What are the alternatives that Proctor must choose between?

1.

2.

**B.** In the chart below, describe the pros and cons of each choice.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **CHOICE** | **PROS** | **CONS** |
| Alternative 1 |  |  |
| Alternative 2 |  |  |

**C**. From a purely practical standpoint, which choice makes more sense? Why does Proctor

hesitate to make that choice?

**D.** Contrast the conflicting attitudes of Reverend Hale and Rebecca Nurse toward the choice that

Proctor has to make.

**E.** Explain why Elizabeth Proctor will not help her husband make up his mind, even though she

herself has strong feelings on the subject.

**Writing About the Play**

Do you think that Proctor makes the right choice? On a separate piece of paper, explain your reasoning in detail. Use your own moral values as well as these explored in the play.

**Teaching Focus**

Moral decisions making involves evaluating choices on the basis of whether they fit with one one’s own system of values. Students examine John Proctor’s decision to face death rather than admit to a crime he knows he did not commit. They contrast the conflicting attitudes of Rebecca Nurse and Reverend Hale toward this choice. Students then evaluate Proctor’s decision, stating and supporting their opinions about whether he made the right choice.

▶ Teaching the Lesson

1. After students have reading Learning About Thinking, call on volunteers to provide examples of situations in which people are required to make moral decisions. Elicit the idea that such decisions are especially difficult when they involve choosing between different moral values.
2. Some students may be uncomfortable with the implications that good people may make different moral choices in the same situation; for example, they may believe that John Proctor really has no choice and that he is obligated to tell the truth.

**Suggested Answers:**

**A1-**Proctor must choose between falsely confessing to witchcraft or continuing to deny the charge

B1 – 2 The pros of confusing include saving his life and thereby saving his family from grief and impoverishment. The cons of this choice include compromising his moral values and possibly casting doubt on the truthfulness of others. The pros of truthfulness include obeying the dictates of his religious training and his conscience. The con is the fact that he will be executed.

C. Confessing to witchcraft is the most practical decision, but it goes against Proctor’s morality, which places a high value on the truth.

D. Reverend Hale argues that in light of the delusions of the judges, it is not immoral to lie—rather, it is immoral for Proctor not to save himself. Rebecca Nurse believes that truthfulness is a moral absolute.

E. Elizabeth Proctor has come to respect her husband’s courage and goodness; she also realizes that good and evil are not as easily defined as she once believed.