



# BURGHERS OF CALAIS

## STIMULUS

Tell the story:

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Seven hundred years ago, the King of England attacked the french town of Calais. Calais is the nearest French town to England. If you have travelled from England to France you may have gone through Calais.

King Edward was angry because the town of Calais was not doing enough to stop pirates from sailing over from France and attacking English ships. But even with all his army, he couldn't capture the town. So he set up a siege. His soldiers surrounded the walls of the town and let nothing and nobody go in. This meant that there was no way to get food into Calais, and the people in Calais gradually started to starve. But they held on for a long time. This made Edward even more furious. It was costing him a lot of money and a lot of soldiers' lives to keep his army in France.

Finally, the people of Calais were too hungry to keep going. The leaders of the town - who were called Burghers - sent a message to King Edward. They begged him to let the people in the town leave freely, without being hurt. Then he could come in and take over the town. But the king refused. He wanted revenge.

Some of his knights tried to change his mind. They reminded him that if he was cruel to these French prisoners then perhaps French kings would be cruel to English prisoners if they had some. The king made a different offer. He said that he would take six prisoners. They would have to walk out of the city in bare feet with ropes around their necks. Everyone was sure that Edward would kill the six people when he got there.

Inside the city, the people argued about what to do. Which six people should be chosen to go out to the King? Whoever did it would be saving the lives of the rest of the town, but would probably die.

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### Task Question: Who should be chosen to go out?

Continue the story:

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After a long discussion, one of the burghers stepped forward and said that he would go. Then, one-by-one, five more of them stepped forward and offered to join him. They took off their shoes and allowed themselves to be put in chains by the English soldiers and taken to see the King.

When the King saw them he told them that they had done a brave thing. Because these six were willing to sacrifice their lives, they were saving the lives of the rest of the town. Then the men were taken away to be killed, as agreed. Just then the King's wife spoke. She reminded him that she was pregnant with their child. 'If you kill these six men so cruelly, it might bring bad luck to our child,' she warned.

At last, the King changed his mind and the six burghers of Calais were free to go.

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