

# SINDBAD AND THE UNDERGROUND STREAM - THINKING ABOUT TRAVEL AND EXPLORATION DILEMMAS

Equipment needed and preparation: a percentage die (a ten-sided die rolled twice, once for the units and again for the tens)

Starting age: 8 years

Key concepts / vocabulary: travel, exploration, risk, self-interest, dilemma, survival,

Subject links: geography: 'travel', 'exploration', 'survival', RE (see 'Touching The Void' extension activity below)

Key controversies: What risks are worth taking? When is it worth risking your own life, only for survival, or for something like exploration?

Quote: 'For the execution of the voyage to the Indies, I did not make use of intelligence, mathematics or maps.' – Christopher Columbus

'...to boldly go where no man has gone before.' – Captain James T. Kirk (Star Trek)

Critical thinking tool: Thinking of alternative positions

Key Facilitation Skill: Given that the children may find these situations difficult to relate to it may be that they see very little controversy. If so, then you may want to encourage controversy by 'tasking' them to think of the issue from more than one side. I have included this into the structure of the nested questions: 1) what reasons are there to do X? and 2) what reasons are there not to do X? and then 3) what do you think of the reasons for and against? You could also, as with the lesson plan Who Wins Wins (see TPF website), employ role-play. They could be given the roles of the wives or husbands of the explorers imploring them not to go, or they could be the King or Queen who would love to have the glory of having been the first country to discover a 'new world'.

## Session Plan:

Adapted from The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights (Sindbad stories) night 560 'The Musk Valley' and 561 'The Underground Stream' (Penguin Classics, trans. by Malcolm C. Lyons, Volume 2). If inserting this into the 'Sindbad Stories' in Once Upon an If then it should follow The Old Man of The Sea'. Either, finish the adventures at the close of this one and have him taken back to Bagdad by a friendly people on the other side of the mountain, or continue the adventure yourself adapting them from the complete collection (see above).

The story of Sindbad and The Underground Stream

On night 560 Sheherazad began telling Sharihar, her recent husband and would-be executioner, the next of Sindbad's adventures. As he had on the previous 559 nights, he agreed to stay her execution in order to hear the next tale. 'This,' she said, 'is what Sindbad related next to his audience of one, to the other Sindbad.' (See Once Upon an If 'The Sindbad Stories'.)

'We are lost!' announced the ship's captain, 'we have strayed from the sea I know into an uncharted sea of which I know nothing and for which I have no charts. And what's more: the rudder has broken. We are now at the mercy of God.' The captain fell to his knees and began to cry and pray. Upon seeing this, the rest of the crew fell either into panic or despair. It would not be long, however, before things got worse, and by comparison, our current predicament would be made to seem positively rosy.

A storm rose up and the ship, rudderless and captainless, was tossed about like a child's toy on the capricious waves. We steered the ship with nothing other than hope and prayers. Eventually, it was capsized and all the crew lost and probably drowned; a fate that surely would have befallen me had I not managed to hang on to a piece of flotsam. The storm then served to deliver me to an island: my punisher also my savior.

I had been delivered to a deserted island. There was little to eat but there were some water springs that not only gave me fresh drinking water, but in which I found a vast deposit of priceless jewels. But, though I was rich beyond my imaginings, I was trapped by the geography of the place, just as I had been in the valley of the diamonds that the Rukh had taken me to in an earlier adventure.

From one of the springs there issued a stream that vanished into a dark, natural tunnel at the base of one of the enclosing mountains. The light that fell into it was utterly eaten by darkness only a matter of meters in. It was terrifying. But more terrifying was the prospect that attended me more and more as time passed that this may be my only hope of escape from this part of the island, the mountains being impassable and unscalable.

After days of searching for another route, I became persuaded that the underground tunnel was indeed my only hope. And it was not much hope. How did I know that the water would not completely submerge at some point along its route? How did I know that it would take me anywhere better than this? Perhaps the other part of the island was just as uninhabited and just as bereft of nourishment. I knew nothing except that if I stayed where I was I would die, not being able to live on water alone.

First, I would need a vessel. I set to building a makeshift raft, bringing to bear all my boat-building skills to make a boat as sturdy as I could but that was small

enough that it would be able to fit through the smallest fissures and make the tightest corners. Once it was done, I decided that I would sleep one more night where I was and make my decision, one way or the other, the following morning. Before sleeping, I prayed a long time, imploring God to see me through this last predicament, if it please him. Very likely, it would be my last morning on this earth, whichever course of action I opted to take.

Morning came.

## Task Question:

- ✓ Should Sindbad take the underground tunnel?

## Nested Questions:

- ✓ What reasons are there for taking the underground tunnel?
- ✓ What reasons are there for not taking the underground tunnel?
- ✓ What do you think of the reasons for and against?
- ✓ What is hope? What is despair?
- ✓ Does praying make a difference?
- ✓ What is prayer?

The story continued...

I decided that there was nothing for it: I would take the tunnel. I sat myself upon the raft, made one last prayer and paddled myself, with a suitable stick I'd found, into the darkness, which, together with an overwhelming fear, engulfed me. As I made my way into the mountain, the passage became narrower and narrower. It was not long before I had to lie down, but not before I lost my paddle. Sometimes the rocks above me were so close to the surface of the stream that they scraped the back of my head. In those moments I feared that the water would meet the roof of the cave and I would drown. So helpless and afraid was I, and for so long did I travel, that I eventually fell asleep. I had no notion of how long I'd drifted through the darkness of the mountain but I awoke with the warmth of the sun on the back of my head... and the sound of unfamiliar, foreign voices. I was – I thanked God – alive! But where was I? And who were those that surrounded me? I opened my eyes.

(See above for advice on what to do next with this story.)

## Extension activities:

Scenario 1: Lost!

Inspired by the 'Lady Be Good' crash of 1943: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lady\\_Be\\_Good\\_\(aircraft\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lady_Be_Good_(aircraft))

The aeroplane you were travelling in has crashed in the Sahara Desert. You have no idea where in the Sahara you are and none of the communication equipment on the plane works. If you venture into the desert there is only one direction where you will stand a chance of survival; all other directions will take you further into the desert where you will surely die. You have no idea which direction is the correct direction or whether someone is coming to find you or whether anybody knows you are missing. With only a single canteen of water to share between the nine of you, just enough for you to survive for about 8 days if you ration the water carefully, you are left with a difficult decision:

## Task Question:

- ✓ Should you stay with the plane wreck or should you venture into the desert?

## Nested Questions:

- ✓ What reasons are there to stay with the wreck?
- ✓ What reasons are there to venture into the desert?
- ✓ What do you think of the reasons for and against?

Introduce the following statistics to focus the discussion, if necessary:

Stats:

There is only a 5% chance of choosing the right direction. Roll for this (see 'Equipment needed and preparation' above)

There is only a 10% chance of stumbling on civilization once you're going in the right general direction. Roll for this.

Scenario 2: To boldly go...

You are explorers in another world where there is no flight, only land and sea travel, very much like things were on Earth in 15th century Europe. The known world reaches to a huge, seemingly endless ocean, much like the edge of Europe stands at the shore of the Pacific Ocean. You can take enough provisions to be able to survive for about three months but not more. You have a strong desire to explore the frontiers of the known world, but if you leave you may well perish.

## Task Question:

- ✔ Should you go?

## Nested Questions:

- ✔ What reasons are there to go?
- ✔ What reasons are there not to go?
- ✔ What do you think of the arguments for and against going?
- ✔ How risky is it?
- ✔ What risks are involved?
- ✔ What level of risk is involved?

Film clip: Touching The Void

Show chapters 9 ('Day five – keeping positive') and 10 ('Going deeper') for the 'decision-making dilemma' and also chapter 8 ('Waiting to die' for the 'religious dilemma', appropriate for older classes) and possibly chapter 6 ('Losing control') and 7 ('helpless and desperate') for the main dilemma of the film: 'to cut or not to cut'. At each stage stop the film to discuss each of the dilemmas with the class:

## Task Questions:

- ✔ After chapter 6 and 7: Should Simon cut the rope?
- ✔ After chapter 8: Should Joe pray? (Good for RE in secondary schools)
- ✔ After chapter 9: Should Joe go deeper into the crevasse?

## Related Resources:

The Philosophy Shop: A New World, Buridan's Asteroid, Metaphysics: Time, Zeno's Parting Shot

Once Upon an If: The Sindbad Stories (particularly The Saddle and The Pit), Flat Earth

40 lessons to get children thinking: The Incredible Shrinking Machine, The Time Machine, When Worlds Collide

The If Machine: To The Edge of Forever, The Meaning of Ant Life, Republic Island,

The If Odyssey by Peter Worley (particularly Choices and The Horror of The Rocks)

TPF Website: Here and Elsewhere, Who Wins Wins, The Time Machine

100 World Myths and Legends by Geraldine McCaughrean: The Armchair Traveller: An Indian Legend (Do PaRDeS with this: see 40 lessons to get children thinking on pages 164-6 and 94-7)