

THE SINDBAD STORIES: THE SADDLE

THE STORY

'And is that the end of your tale?' asked Sindbad the porter.

'If it were, it would be one of the most fantastical tales yet told,' said Sindbad

the sailor, "but fate and fortune had not finished with me yet. I was returned safely home again but it was not long before I was aboard another ship seeking adventure once more. Once a man tastes travel and adventure – and especially fortune – it is a taste not easily given up. The ship, however, was battered by one of the most violent storms I have ever witnessed and was driven towards a rocky outpost. The ship was dashed, as if paper, against the rocks hidden just beneath the surface of the sea. Unlike many of the other sailors I managed to get hold of a piece of flotsam that kept my head above the waves.'

Sindbad continued his story:

'For two days I drifted through the open ocean until I was spotted, against all the odds, by another ship. The men on board were friendly enough and they took me back with them to their own island. When I arrived I was taken to see their king. He invited me to sup with him and to tell him who I was and where I had come from. That evening I began the tale that I have told you. He was so enthralled with my adventures that he asked to hear more the following night. For several nights I entertained the king with my extraordinary tales. I was well looked after.

'I had noticed that the people of this island rode horses as we do at home but that they did not use saddles and bridles.

"Why do you not use saddles?" I asked the king, but it became clear that he did not know what a saddle was. I explained that riding horses is much easier, and more comfortable, with a saddle.

'To show my gratitude for the hospitality shown me by the king I asked if I could offer him, and his people, a gift.

"What could you possibly give me? You have nothing," he observed.

"I will need some leather, some wood, nails and tools. If you can get these for me then I will be able to make you a gift," I said.

'He sent for the items I had requested and, immediately, I set to work. I had, as a youth, learned the craft of saddle-making. Though I hadn't made one in a long time, the knowledge had not deserted me, and I was able to make one of the best saddles I had ever made. I showed the king how to use the saddle and bridle and he was overjoyed at the advantages he could see this new technology would afford him and his people.'

Task 1: your gift

TX (see page 7) Technology: Suppose that you, like Sindbad, have been lost at sea, then rescued and welcomed by a people that live on an island but without the technological advancements that have been made in your own society. For instance, there are no cars or computers.

Task: Can you think of something that you could introduce to them? Remember: it must be something you could build or describe how to build (your suggestions will be tested). Cars or computers are too complicated for us to be able to build or describe in detail. What would you be able to introduce?

First of all, collect ideas from the children, only then, challenge them ('So what would you need to be able to do that?' 'Where would you get nails from? Can you explain how to do that to the blacksmith?'). For example, a class I worked with said:

- ✓ an axe
- ✓ an elastic band-launcher • a gun
- ✓ a bow and arrow
- ✓ a table
- ✓ a pencil box.

Next, remove the more complicated / controversial ones (e.g. an elastic band- launcher because it pre-supposes elastic bands; a gun, because it is far too complicated and may be an unsuitable subject for young children). We ended up with:

- ✓ an axe
- ✓ a bow and arrow
- ✓ a table
- ✓ a pencil (simplified from 'a pencil box').

Split them into groups. The two questions to ask each group are:

1. What would you need to make it? (Materials, tools etc.)
2. How would you do it? (What instructional steps would be needed?)

Extension activity: instructions

- ✓ Set them the task of writing their own set of step-by-step instructions for their item. Test it by asking someone else to follow the instructions.
- ✓ Try to explain, by writing it down, how to tie a shoe-lace. Can you do it? Is it easy?
- ✓ Can you list ten things that are really very useful, but which are also very simple, such as a paper clip. Can you describe how they are made?

Task 2: would it be right?

The next stage is to move to a moral question. First of all, take an example such as the axe, then ask the class to come up with 'one good thing' about introducing an axe to a society hitherto without axes; then ask for 'one bad thing'. Carry on in this way until you have a reasonably balanced list. One class I did this with came up with (for an axe):

GOOD

They can chop trees down
Build things
Can protect themselves

BAD

They might hurt themselves
Destroys the environment
Children might get hurt

Task Question: Would it be right (or good) to introduce the axe to these people?

Nested Questions:

- ✓ Does one outweigh the other? (For example, does the good outweigh the bad?)
- ✓ Do long-term considerations outweigh the short-term? What about the other way round?
- ✓ How do you decide if something is good or bad for society?
- ✓ (The teacher and/or the children could) find out about an approach to ethical / moral considerations such as this, called consequentialism. Is consequentialism the right way to make these sorts of decisions?
- ✓ Would we be right to interfere with other societies? Would it be wrong not to introduce a technology to another society? What would a consequentialist say? Do you agree?

Extension activity: cars

Cars are thought to be an indispensable item of modern society. Put cars under the same analysis as the axe in the previous activity. Set the class the task of researching the good things and the bad things that cars have conferred on society. Then ask: are cars a good thing or a bad thing for us?

TX car inventor: imagine you went back in time to meet the inventor of the car. Knowing what you know about how cars have impacted on society what would you say to the inventor of cars? Would you try to stop the inventor from inventing cars? (This could be turned into a role-playing exercise, or could be used for the basis of a dialogue – see 'Writing dialogues' on page 116).