

Teaching for Wisdom Through History: Infusing Wise Thinking Skills in the School Curriculum

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Shortly after Hurricane Katrina, some residents of New Orleans who remained in the city began looting stores. Many were in search of food and water and other basic necessities that were unavailable because of the destruction. Jackie Roberts, the owner of a drugstore on Canal Street, faced a dilemma: open the doors of her store and let people come in and take what they wanted, which would mean losing more money in addition to the damage the floods had already done to her store and storage facilities; or protect her store from looters with the help of a few armed friends, shooting at looters if necessary.

Lee Ann Brown of Baton Rouge faced another type of dilemma. The single mother, who works two jobs, was concerned for her elderly parents, who can no longer care for themselves. After reading media accounts of what happened in some nursing homes when Hurricane Katrina hit, Brown worried that her parents would not properly be cared for in the type of nursing home she could afford. On the other hand, taking them in to live with her and her two children would exacerbate tensions in their already cramped household, and her teenage sons strongly opposed it.

When the Miller family evacuated their home on Lake Pontchartrain, they were confronted with the realization that all their household pets, including two dogs, could not fit in the car that would take them out of the city to safety. They had to make a choice—leave some of the animals behind or have a family member remain with the pets until further evacuation help could be found.

All three examples above depict people in extremely difficult situations; but the kinds of dilemmas they face are similar to what all of us, at any age, have to confront when choosing between our own best interests and those of others, be they strangers, close family members, or beloved pets. To solve dilemmas of this type, we need more than just knowledge or analytical thinking skills. We need wisdom.

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