



Decision Detectives

Identifying Decision Traps and Cognitive Biases that We Deal with Every Day

Primary DQ Element: Reasoning

Approximate Time: 30 Minutes

Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

- Learn about the primary Decision Traps and Cognitive Biases that interfere with our decision-making.
- Get experience with Decision Skills in social contexts.
- Identify the Cognitive Biases at work, and use DQ Elements to address them.

Materials Needed:

- ☐ The Decision QuickStudy Sheet and Student Workbooks turned to the Decision Detectives page
- ☐ A bag of candies (starburst or tootsie rolls work well!)
- ☐ The 'Friday Night Decision' Video https://youtu.be/_624-ZRXYNg
- ☐ Whiteboard and pens

Preparation:

- Study up on Cognitive Biases and how they affect us at:
www.wikipedia.org/cognitivebias

Instructions Part 1:

- *WE'RE GOING TO NOW EXPLORE HOW DECISION SKILLS CAN HELP US IN SOCIAL SETTINGS. LET'S WATCH A VIDEO THAT WAS MADE BY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ABOUT A YOUNG MAN WHO IS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO SPEND HIS FRIDAY NIGHT. AT THE CLIFFHANGER MOMENT AT THE END OF THE FILM, YOU WILL ALL VOTE ON WHAT THE PROTAGONIST SHOULD DO AND BE READY TO EXPLAIN WHY BASED ON CLEAR VALUES.*
- Play the film, and then ask the students as a class to vote on whether the young man should go to the movie or go to the party.
- Ask the students to explain their selection in terms of the values it involves. Coach them to discuss 'Friendship' and 'Romance' and 'Loyalty' and 'Popularity'. If possible, identify the values that come into a tradeoff scenario. Are there times when we develop a romance, and sometimes friendships suffer?





Instructions Part 2:

- *WHAT YOU MAY NOT HAVE REALIZED IS THAT THE TEENAGE FILMMAKERS WHO CREATED THIS SHORT MOVIE HAVE EMBEDDED MORE THAN 10 DECISION TRAPS, HIDDEN LIKE EASTER EGGS IN THE NARRATIVE AS IT UNFOLDS. LET'S REVIEW THE TRAPS.*
- Have students take out their QuickStudy Sheets, and direct them to the section labeled "Beware: Decision Traps".
- *DECISION TRAPS ARE A SPECIFIC SUBSET OF COGNITIVE BIASES. COGNITIVE BIASES ARE FUNCTIONS OF OUR BRAINS THAT TRICK US. PSYCHOLOGISTS STUDY THESE TRICKS WHICH ARE THE EQUIVALENT OF OPTICAL ILLUSIONS FOR OUR NERVOUS SYSTEM. ON THE QUICKSTUDY SHEET ARE THE 8 MOST INFLUENTIAL COGNITIVE BIASES IN THE LIVES OF TEENAGERS. LET'S EXPLAIN WHAT EACH ONE IS, AND HOW TO USE DECISION SKILLS TO RECOGNIZE AND MOVE THROUGH THEM.*

Have students give concrete examples for each of the following traps and ways they can use the Decision Quality Elements to address each one:

- Living on auto-pilot...Instead, you should seize your decision power!
- Bandwagon effect...Instead, determine your role in a decision!
- Habitual frame...Instead, use lists to check your decision fitness!
- Compromised decision state...Instead, HALT and check if you're hungry, angry, lonely, or tired!
- Stuck in a comfort zone...Instead, balance your default decision style!
- Ignoring possible outcomes...Instead, do a HIP check and predict what could happen!
- Procrastination...Instead, establish internal and external deadlines!
- Sunk costs...Instead, leave the past alone and focus on the future!

Instructions Part 3:

- *NOW LET'S PLAY DETECTIVE! WE'RE GOING TO RE-WATCH THE FILM. IF YOU SPOT A DECISION TRAP, RAISE YOUR HAND, AND I WILL PAUSE THE FILM. IF YOU DETECTED IT CORRECTLY, AND CAN DESCRIBE THE CLUES INDICATING THE TRAP, YOU WILL EARN A NOD. IF YOU ALSO EXPLAIN HOW THAT DECISION TRAP MIGHT AFFECT THE MAIN CHARACTER'S THINKING, YOU WILL EARN A PRIZE FOR YOUR ACUITY.*
- Play the film, pause it whenever a student raises their hand and calls out a correctly perceived Decision Trap.
- Does the class have a new, alternative Friday night solution to the protagonist's dilemma?
- While they complete the Decision Detectives workbook page, challenge the students to consider all the ways that Decision Traps may be affecting their own thinking.
- Inform them that there will be further mentions of Decision Traps in subsequent videos and activities.

