**The Fallout Shelter (1966)**

Imagine that our country is under threat of imminent nuclear attack. A person approaches you and asks you to make an independent decision concerning a nearby fallout shelter that can accommodate 6 people but has 12 people vying to get in. Based on the following information about the 12 people, which 6 would you choose to go in the shelter? Feel free to make jot-notes below that reflect your reasoning.

The group includes:

* a 40 year old male violinist who is a suspected narcotics pusher
* a 34 year old male architect who is known to be homosexual
* a 26 year old lawyer; the lawyer’s 24 year old wife who has just gotten out of a mental institution. They both want to go in together or stay out together
* a 75 year old priest
* a 34 year old retired prostitute who was so successful that she’s been living off her annuities for 5 years
* a 20 year old black militant
* a 23 year old female graduate student who speaks publicly on the virtues of chastity
* a 28 year old male physicist who will only come into the shelter if he can bring his gun with him
* a 30 year old female MD who is an avowed bigot
* a 12 year old girl who has a low IQ
* a high school student

**The Fallout Shelter – TEACHER NOTES**

**Concept:** The Fallout Shelter exercise has proved to be an exciting, provocative, and involving way for students to examine and clarify their values (see Raths, Harmin & Simon, 1966) . It can also be used to explore basic concepts in role and stereotyping theory, the dynamic processes that operate in groups, the psychology of language, the nature of attitude and value acquisition, as well as research on moral development.

**Instructions:** Spin the following story to your students. Imagine that our country is under threat of imminent nuclear attack. A person approaches you and asks you to make an independent decision concerning a nearby fallout shelter that can accommodate 6 people but has 12 people vying to get in. Based on the following information about the 12 people, which 6 would you choose to go in the shelter? Feel free to make jot-notes below that reflect your reasoning. The group includes a 40 year old male violinist who is a suspected narcotics pusher; a 34 year old male architect who is known to be homosexual; a 26 year old lawyer; the lawyer’s 24 year old wife who has just gotten out of a mental institution. They both want to go in together or stay out together; a 75 year old priest; a 34 year old retired prostitute who was so successful that she’s been living off her annuities for 5 years; a 20 year old black militant; a 23 year old female graduate student who speaks publicly on the virtues of chastity; a 28 year old male physicist who will only come into the shelter if he can bring his gun with him; a 30 year old female MD who is an avowed bigot; a 12 year old girl who has a low IQ; a high school student.

**Discussion:** There are a number of ways to follow up this exercise.

1. Ask the students to role play or write a script for the 12 characters and present their cases for admission to the shelter. A look at the assumptions students make can lead to an examination of role theory and stereotype formation.
2. Have students respond to questions like these: In the group consensus discussion, did you stand up for what you believed? Did you feel pressure to conform? If so, who or what caused it? How did the group reach decisions? Did you feel part of those decisions? These questions can then be tied into an investigation of group process theory as well as the dynamics underlying conformity (Solomon Asch’s work would be perfect here).
3. Suggest that your students apply Charles Osgood’s semantic differential to each of the characteristics as a way of leading into a study of the psychology of language.
4. After students have responded to the question, “What values were you protecting in your own list?” they could investigate the research on attitude and value formation ( including the work of Milton Rokeach and Herbert Kelman, Fritz Heider’s balance theory, and Leon Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory) and moral development (ex. Lawrence Kohlberg’s development theory).

Taken directly from *Activities Handbook for the Teaching of Psychology, Volume 1* by Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr.; Kathleen D. Lowman (editors); American Psychology Association