



Introduction

What is the value of a human life? Are some worth more than others? This assembly uses data from the report of a human disaster to reflect on how different 'classes' of people were treated before and during the sinking of the Titanic, over 100 years ago. It also uses these statistics to reveal the generous sacrifice of those who willingly surrendered their own lives during the disaster, so that others could live.

For some children, a quick visual recap of how percentages work (with a blank 100 square) will aid understanding.

Preparation

Source a range of pictures and illustrations relating to the sinking of the (from Google Images), and show them using PowerPoint or similar. You will definitely need to include the statistical table shown below (sourced from Film Education resources for the 1997 film Titanic), presented clearly for all to see using an IT projector.

Development

How many of you have heard of the sinking of the Titanic? What facts do you know about the real ship and what happened?

The Titanic was a large ocean-going liner built just over 100 years ago, designed to carry passengers across the North Atlantic from Europe to the USA. On its first voyage, it hit an iceberg and sank, just off the coast of Newfoundland, in Canada. Many people drowned because there weren't enough lifeboats, and the crew weren't well practised in using the lifeboats. Afterwards, the Government set up a special enquiry to investigate what had happened, and why so many people had died. One of the things they found out was the exact number of people who went out on the ship in the first place, and who actually survived after the sinking. Click [here](#) to see the numbers.

You can see it's divided up into men, women and children. It's also divided up into passengers and crew. You can also see that the passengers are divided up into first, second, and third class - if you paid more for your ticket, you had better accommodation, and that was first class. Many rich and famous people were travelling in first class, where the cabins were larger and cleaner, and had more natural light. They had servants to look after them, and excellent food served in the finest restaurants on-board. Travelling in first class must have made those passengers feel very important. Does having more money make you more important? Is your life worth more than that of someone with less money?

If you travelled in second or third class, the cabins were smaller and darker the further you went below deck. The food wasn't so good. But many poor people used a trip like this to leave their old lives in Europe and travel cheaply to find a better life in another country such as Canada or the USA.



Some were asylum seekers. Perhaps they didn't feel as important as the people in first class - but it was the only way they could make the journey.

Looking deeper

But all that became rather different when the ship started to sink in the icy waters of the North Atlantic Ocean. What happened then? Did everyone start fighting their way towards the lifeboats? Have a closer look at these numbers - because they tell a very different story.

Some people did stand a better chance of surviving. (Look at the last box.) A large number of the first-class passengers made it into the lifeboats - but it wasn't so good for the people travelling in second or third class - or the crew. I wonder why that was?

Some groups of people were more likely to survive the sinking than others. If you were a child on the Titanic, you stood a 50% chance of surviving the sinking. If you were a woman, you stood a 75% chance of coming out alive. Survival was less likely if you were a man, or a member of the crew. (Point out and read aloud some of the figures from the table.) Why do you think this is? Men are usually physically stronger - why didn't they push their way on to the lifeboats first? (Discuss this in pairs, and give feedback.)

One reason is that many of the male passengers and crew decided the women and children should go on the lifeboats first. 'Women and children first!' they shouted, standing back as the boats filled up with people. They knew there weren't enough lifeboats to take everyone, so these brave men chose to stay on the ship as it sank. They were heroes, sacrificing their own lives so that others could live. What do you think about that? Could you put someone else first like that?

Jesus said, 'No one shows greater love than when he lays down his life for his friends' (John 15:13, ISV). That happened on the Titanic - hundreds of times. The physically stronger people allowed the others to live. That's a different kind of strength, isn't it? Putting others first. Valuing their lives more highly than your own.

Meditation

I wonder how much we value the lives of other people, and their feelings. What about the people we share a classroom with - or a playground? Remember that on the *Titanic*, the real heroes that night were the ones who put other people first.

Prayer

Father God, thank you for people who give up their own lives for others. If we are strong, help us to think first about the needs of others.



Thought for today

When Jesus was talking about how God would judge the world, he said, 'Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first' (Matthew 19:30, ISV). How will we treat other people today?

Music suggestions

'When I needed a neighbour' - Sydney Bertram Carter (*Come and Praise* 65)

'The family of man' (*Come and Praise* 69)

For the classroom

Literacy/History: explore contemporary reports of the disaster, and write your own newspaper report based on the data. What might your newspaper have to say about these numbers?

Numeracy: use calculators or written methods to work out percentages for survival rates in the different categories of passengers and crew. Also set More Able pupils the challenge of using the data to ask and answer more questions, and of creating their own investigations from which to draw further conclusions. (One aspect could be to compare survival rates in first and third class.) Use spreadsheets to facilitate this, and for displaying results. Feed this work back into a future assembly.

IT: explore different ways of presenting the data in graphs, especially pie graphs (which were invented a few years prior to the *Titanic* disaster).

(This idea has been adapted from Chris Hudson, '*Titanic Maths*', *Cracking RE*, published by The Stapleford Centre.)

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