

Name _____ Date _____

Critical Thinking Exercise: Assisted Suicide

This critical thinking exercise addresses a controversial and complex issue. There are many different views on this issue and no right answer. Read the following summary of a news article on the topic of assisted suicide.* Then use the worksheet on the next page to construct your reasonable view on the issue. You may want to discuss these issues with groups of students in your class.

A man was ordered to face a murder trial for the killing of his wife, who was suffering from Lou Gehrig's disease as well as severe heart disease. As a result of this disease, she could not talk or walk and had to be fed through a tube in her abdomen. One day, his wife managed to scrawl a note in which she asked her husband of forty-eight years to kill her. The husband was described as a loving spouse who was devoted to caring for his wife. The man gave his wife an injection of ground-up sleeping pills. The wife became unconscious after the sleeping pills were administered, but she did not die. The distraught husband carried his wife to the car where he attached a vacuum-cleaner hose to the exhaust pipe and ran it into the car. He got into the car, along with the family pets, intending to kill his wife, himself, and the pets. After twelve hours, the man woke up to find his wife and one of the family pets dead. The level of carbon monoxide in the wife's blood was not high enough to kill a healthy person but enough to kill his frail wife. The man was ordered to stand trial for killing his wife. His lawyer argued that it was a crime of "passion and compassion." The prosecution said that what the man did was illegal and that he should be sent to jail. Assisted suicide is a source of debate across the country. In Oregon, there is a "death with dignity" law. This law allows a doctor to prescribe a lethal dose of barbiturates to patients who have less than six months to live. Since the law took effect in 1997, 292 people have asked their doctors to prescribe drugs to end their lives. **

Was the man described above guilty of murder? Should he go to jail? What were the man's values? Should laws be changed to allow assisted suicide? Look at the different points of view and examine your own values to construct a reasonable point of view.

Critical Thinking Worksheet: Assisted Suicide

Use the summary of the news article on assisted suicide to answer the questions below. Discuss the issue with a group of students in your class. Remember that there is no right answer, only your reasonable view.

1. State the problem as simply and clearly as you can.
2. Describe the values and point of view of the man who killed his wife.
3. Describe the values and point of view of the wife.
4. Describe the legal, social and medical issues. What is the law? Should it be changed? If you were a medical doctor, what would you propose? How would this impact society?
5. After discussing the issues and looking at different points of view, what is your reasonable point of view? Why? Include a brief description of your values. On a separate sheet of paper explain your point of view.