Fertile Question: *Where do I draw the line?*

**Core Content Area 1: Ethics, values and morality**

**TOPIC 1.2: Conscience and consequences**

**Depthing Understanding: More about conscience**

In this lesson students will explore understandings about conscience, and moral decision-making.

**Teachers: Before You Start!**

1. This lesson is for students who will not complete this lesson in the Good and Evil unit.
2. Read the Teacher Background on conscience and moral decision making.

**For students to explore understandings about conscience and moral judgement, select from the following activities:**

1. Discuss the meaning of the terms *conscience* and *moral judgement*.
   a. Read the information in Useful Resources about what conscience is and is not and about Catholic moral decision-making.
   b. Set up the classroom as a continuum line, placing *strongly agree* at one end and *strongly disagree* at the other. Students respond to statements about conscience and judgement by placing themselves on the continuum. Students justify their position when requested.

   *Feeling guilty does not mean you have acted against your conscience.*

   *Conscience is not infallible because our own circumstances are always historically, socially and culturally defined.*

   *It is always possible to discern the right thing to do.*

   *Conscription (forcing people to enlist in the military and go to war) is wrong because it forces some people to go against their conscience.*

2. Analyse moral dilemmas to develop understanding about moral judgement.
   a. View the trailer for the movie *My Sister's Keeper* (2mins 32secs)
      i. Discuss the decision that Anna made to sue her parents for the rights to her own body, in terms of the three aspects of conscience: capacity, process and judgement. *(See Useful Resources)*
      ii. Discuss the decision of the parents to genetically engineer a child to use as a source of body parts for the older daughter. What aspects of conscience are referred to in the clip? What sources of wisdom would you use to make the decision that the parents did? What values would be involved in making decisions?
   b. Access the Melbourne Catholic Education Ethics page and choose a dilemma to analyse.
      i. Complete the table in Useful resources to justify the decision you made regarding the chosen issue.
      ii. Share your justification with a partner or in a small group.
      iii. Compare the process of making these decisions with making snap decisions. What skills would improve the probability of making good snap decisions? What skills are required to cope with the consequences of poor decisions?

3. Examine the concept of fallibility with regard to conscience.
   a. Read the article about Juvenile crime for an insight into why some people make and continue to make poor decisions.
      i. Answer the questions in Useful Resources to gain insight into the importance of forming conscience.
   b. Conclude this lesson by reflecting on the benefits of being open to ongoing formation of your conscience.
Conscience

What conscience is NOT:
Conscience is not a feeling, whether good or bad. One can feel guilty about a whole range of things which have nothing to do with conscience. Similarly, the fact that one does not feel guilty about an issue does not make it right. It is also not making up one’s mind by oneself about what ought be done. Conscience is not infallible because our own circumstances are always historically, socially and culturally defined. Decisions of conscience are necessarily fallible and subject to correction and change.

What conscience IS:
Only when one decides to do, or not to do, something, is one acting out of conscience. But, as noted above, we can never know ourselves completely, and so decisions of conscience are necessarily incomplete and partial. Conscience is the act of moral judgement. (Thomas Aquinas) Conscience is what summons us to love good and avoid evil. (Vatican II)

There are three levels of Conscience:
1. Capacity: an innate sense of the fundamental characteristic of being human which makes it possible to know and do good.
2. Process: searching for what is right through accurate perception and analysis, making use of sources of moral wisdom wherever they may be found.

Ultimately conscience is the whole person’s commitment to values and the judgement one must make in light of that commitment to apply those values.
### Justifying a position

**Problem:**

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**Decision**

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**Catholic Moral Decision Making**

The greatest assistance for one’s conscience is the gift of discernment. It presupposes the following qualities:

- Knowledge of moral principles
- Experience and the ability to profit from it
- An ability to learn from others
- An ability to make rational inferences
- Inventiveness and creativity, vision and foresight
- An ability to see and weigh circumstances
- An ability to anticipate and weigh circumstances
- An ability to anticipate obstacles and plan to surmount them
- An ability to decide in the light of the preceding.

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**Report challenges juvenile offender assumptions.** ([Article ABC News.](http://example.com)) Answer the following questions:

1. What did Dr Weatherburn say were the reasons younger offenders were more likely to reoffend?
2. What did Darren Ryan say that supported Dr Weatherburn’s reasons?
3. What do you think the article suggests about the importance of the family in forming the conscience and good decision-making?
4. If a family is "dysfunctional" where else might a person gain wisdom to form their conscience and learn about right from wrong?
5. How is it that some adults overcome horrendous childhood experiences and backgrounds or have committed an evil act and are transformed to do good and help others to do good? For example, Nelson Mandela, Rubin Carter (Hurricane),
6. What do you think the following saying means? It **takes a village to raise a child**.