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WHOSE BODY?

A one-hour high school philosophical enquiry session designed by Michelle Sowe

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Teaching resources needed for this session:

- 2.5-min edited video stimulus produced by The Philosophy Club with voiceover by Michelle Sowe and including footage from the film *My Sister's Keeper*
- Printable cards (printed and cut) for a card sorting activity. These include copies of particular Articles from the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* together with continuum header cards, which are all provided in a PDF that accompanies this session plan. If you have a full class, please print two copies of the card sets so that students are still able to work in small groups.
- 3.5-minute edited audio stimulus adapted from the *Radiolab* podcast episode entitled 'Asking for a Friend'

[0:00] (*Time from start of session*)

Kate and Anna (Story based on the book *My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult; film directed by Nick Cassavetes)

(2 minutes) > **PLAY VIDEO: My Sister's Keeper video stimulus**

For your reference: a transcript of the voiceover in this video stimulus:

When she was a toddler, Kate was diagnosed with acute leukemia. Her parents chose to conceive another child through in vitro fertilisation in order to save Kate. Careful genetic engineering ensured that Anna, their second daughter, was a perfect genetic match with her sister Kate.

Anna has always known she is a "donor child." Since birth, she has been in and out of hospital, donating blood, bone marrow and stem cells to her elder sister so as to keep her alive.

And it's working. Kate was expected to die at the age of five. But she's made it to 16, and she's still fighting.

Anna, now aged 13, has spent her life undergoing major medical procedures to save her sister. She's never complained, because the sisters really do love each other dearly.

But now Kate's kidneys are failing, and she'll need an organ donation. And Anna is under pressure to donate one of her kidneys.

This is the tipping point. Anna has had enough. She's dismayed to think that she was only conceived as an organ bank, and she wants her chance at a normal life without repeated trips to the operating room.

Anna may be young, but she's bright and determined, and she doesn't want to be compelled to give up the kidney that her sister now desperately needs.

With her sister's condition deteriorating, Anna shocks the family by hiring a lawyer to file a lawsuit against her parents. Anna is demanding 'medical emancipation', which means freedom from her parents' wishes. Medical emancipation would take away her parents' authority over her body, in terms of the medical procedures she can be subjected to.

(23 mins) **Discussion**

From a moral point of view, do you think that Anna **should** get medical emancipation, and be able to choose for herself whether to donate her kidney?

If students say yes (in support of Anna):

Do Anna's rights to govern her own body trump her obligations to the sister she claims to love?

Should Anna be prepared to let Kate die?

Don't we owe it to our siblings to protect them if we can?

If students say no (in support of Kate):

Anna says she has her own life to live and that she deserves a normal life. Does she have a point?

How much discomfort and risk should be tolerated to save someone else's life?

Isn't informed consent important? Anna never officially consented to being the 'donor child'.

Is it okay for parents to decide what's best for their children? Shouldn't the children have a say?

At what age should a child be allowed to have control over their own body?

Note: If you're pro-life, you would require Anna to donate her kidney, although there is a chance she could die, and her sister doesn't have a good prognosis. If you're pro-choice, you would support Anna's lawsuit.

[0:25]

(20 mins) **Spectrum activity: Children's legal rights**

We're going to have a think about how children's legal rights might bear on the case of Anna and Kate.

I'm going to hand out a few cards. Each card states a right or entitlement that has been granted to children and enshrined as an Article in a United Nations Convention.

I'm going to split you into four small groups, I want you to think about this, for each Article: Does it support the view that Anna should *not* win the court case? Or does it support the view that Anna *should* win the court case? Or is it somewhere in the middle?

Lay out a continuum in a place that is visible to all students, using the header cards provided:

Anna should not win medical emancipation... ..Anna should win.
She should be obliged to donate the kidney **She shouldn't be obliged to donate the kidney**

Divide class into four subgroups of approx. 5 students each.

Give two subgroups Article 2 & 24.

Give the other subgroups Article 5 & 36.

Instruct the students:

Think about where on the spectrum each Article belongs:
Does the Article support Anna winning or not winning?

Small group deliberation followed by students placing each Article on the spectrum (giving reasons), before opening up for collaborative inquiry and reasoning.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Four of the most relevant Articles selected for this workshop

Article 2.

No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

(deliberately ambiguous)

Article 5.

Your family has the responsibility to ensure that your rights are protected.

(deliberately ambiguous)

Article 24.

You have the right to the best health care possible.

Article 36.

You have the right to protection from any kind of exploitation (being taken advantage of).

[0:45]

Radiolab 'Asking for a friend' excerpts

I'm going to play you a 3 minute audio clip, and while you're listening, I want you to have a think about this question:

In what sense do we have a right to our bodies? In what sense do we *own* our own bodies and body parts? Are they actually our property?

Note: the audio clip starts in the middle of discussion about who owns a lung in the case of a lung transplant operation.

> PLAY AUDIO [3.5 min edited excerpt]

[0:49]

(16 mins) Discussion

If you don't own your body, what DO you own? Could there be anything more 'yours' than your body?

Should the law be changed to recognise that your body parts are legally your possessions?

Many people feel that this earth isn't *ours*, but rather we are caretakers whose role is to safeguard the environment for future generations. Could we have a similar relationship with our *bodies* – they are not ours, but we are just bound to look after them?

[1:00] End of session

If you've used this session plan, please get in touch and let me know how it went!

Michelle Sowe

Founder and MD

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