

Identifying Assumptions

Read the following story and answer the questions that follow.

When it happened, a disturbing mix of feelings bubbled inside you. It sickened you to watch the boat slip beneath the waves and disappear forever; so much work had gone into maintaining it and keeping it afloat, but at least everyone was safe in the tiny lifeboat you'd had just enough time to launch. You secretly congratulated yourself for having had the foresight to stock the lifeboat with a few emergency items such as a small amount of food and water, but you knew that a boat built to hold three, maybe four people wasn't going to survive too long with such an overload of passengers.

You looked around at your companions: the brilliant Dr. Brown, whose cleverness and quick wit had impressed you on many occasions; Marie Brown, pregnant and clearly exhausted from the climb into the lifeboat; Lieutenant Ashley Morganstern, a twenty-year veteran who'd seen the most brutal sorts of combat; the lieutenant's secretary and traveling companion, whose shirt you noticed for the first time bore the monogram "L.B," but whom everyone called, simply, "Letty"; and Eagle-Eye Sam, the trusted friend who'd been at your side for many years as you sailed the oceans in your precious, now-vanished boat and whose nickname had been earned from having the ability to spot the smallest objects seemingly miles away at sea.

Seeing the fear on your passenger's faces, you tried to comfort them: "Don't worry; we'll be fine. They'll be looking for us right away. I'm sure of it." But you weren't so sure. In fact, you knew it wasn't true. It might be days before you were found since you'd had no time to radio for help. Rescuers probably wouldn't be dispatched until Friday, five days from now, when your failure to show up in port would finally arouse concern.

On the third day, your passengers showed increasing signs of frustration, anger and fear. "Where are they?" Marie cried. "We can't go on like this!"

You knew she was right. We can't, you thought, not all of us anyway.

On the fourth day the food was completely gone and just enough water remained to keep perhaps three people alive for another day, maybe two. Suddenly things got worse. "Is that water?!" Marie screamed pointing a shaking finger at the bottom of the lifeboat. Horrified, you looked to see a slight trickle of water seeping in at the very center of the boat. Dr. Brown grabbed a tee-shirt that was lying in the bottom of the boat and used it like a sponge to absorb the water, wringing it out over the side and plunging it into the invading water again and again. But it was no use; the water began to seep in faster than Brown could

work.

"We're too heavy," the lieutenant insisted without emotion. "We've got to lighten the load. Someone has to get out and swim."

"Swim?!" Marie gasped in disbelief. "Are you insane?! There are sharks in these waters!"

"Who's it going to be, Captain?" the lieutenant asked almost coldly, staring you square in the eye. "Which one of us swims?"

"Me. I'll go," you say, swinging your leg out over the side of the boat.

"No," Letty insisted. "You're the only one who knows anything about boats or the ocean. If you go, we'll all die. You must choose one of us to sacrifice.

And so you did.

A. Answer the following questions individually:

1. Which one did you choose? Why? Why didn't you choose the others?
2. As you read, you probably imagined what the characters looked like. From the image you had of them, describe the following characters in a few sentences:

The Captain

Dr. Brown

Marie Brown

Lieutenant Ashley Morganstern

Letty

Eagle-Eye Sam

3. What is the relationship between Dr. Brown and Marie Brown?

B. Now get into groups of three, and complete the following tasks:

1. Compare your responses to Question 1 in Part A. Discuss your reasons for your decisions. Is there any consensus in the group?
2. Do you all agree on the relationship between Dr. Brown and Marie Brown?

3. What evidence is there in the story to support your answer for Question 3 in Part A? Is it possible that they are related in another way or not at all?

4. Look at your portraits of Dr. Brown. How many assumptions did you and your group members make about the doctor's gender, age, appearance, and profession? What evidence in the story supports your image of the doctor? If your images are similar, what do you think accounts for that similarity? Are your mental images similar to ones we normally see in the media for example?

Look at your portraits of the other characters. First, what similarities do you find among your group members? Second, what evidence is there in the story to support your assumptions? Are other assumptions possible? Finally, where do you think your mental images came from?