

MEMBERSHIP

WOULD YOU RATHER?



About this activity

A classic conversation game in which players debate dilemmas

- ▶ **Language level:** B1
- ▶ **Main tasks:** Speaking
- ▶ **Topic:** Dilemmas
- ▶ **Language focus:** Hypothetical would; the second conditional

For this activity, you will need the following:

- **A video** – see below
- **The worksheet** on pages 6 and 7 (one for each student)

IMPORTANT: For all materials and discussion, please go to the corresponding page in the Resources section:

<https://membership.lessonstream.com/resources/would-you-rather/>



The video

Mobile devices are powerful teaching tools. We can use them to obtain samples of spoken language from expert users of English. This activity makes use of a short video in which two friends of mine discuss a dilemma. The resulting video and transcript allows students to study the language and then apply it to some similar discussion questions.



Activity outline

1. Tell students that they are going to watch a video in which two British people – Jess and James – discuss a question. Students have to watch the video and guess what the question is.
2. Play the video from 00:07 (just after the question has been asked). Ask students to listen to Jess and James and guess and then write down the question. They can do this in pairs.

Note: The video is on YouTube and has subtitles which can be turned on/off at your discretion.

3. Listen to students' ideas about the mystery question but don't give them the answer yet.
4. Tell students that they are going to watch the video a second time. This time they will hear the question. Tell students to watch and listen to Jess and James carefully because afterwards, you are going to ask them some questions.
5. Play the video and then give out the worksheet. Ask students to answer the five questions on the first page.

Note: Rather than giving out the worksheet at this stage, you might want to write the five questions on the board or screen. This will prevent students from referring to the video transcript to find the answers.

6. Go over the answers.

- i. The question is: "Would you rather spend a month in prison or two years alone on a desert island?" We use "I would rather ..." (contracted to "I'd rather ...") to show that you have a preference for one thing over another.
- ii. Jess decides that she would rather spend two years alone on a desert island.
- iii. James decides that he would rather spend a month in prison.
- iv. James persuades Jess to change her mind.
- v. At the time of making the video, Jess and James were in a relationship. Although they are no longer together they are still friends.

7. Ask students to do part two of the worksheet (i.e. read the video transcript and answer the four questions that follow it.)

Notes:

- You may have to clarify what modal auxiliary verbs and second conditionals are.
- You might want to point out that the video transcript has been adapted. Some gentle changes have been made in order to keep the grammar point consistent and make the text more learner friendly.

8. Listen to students' ideas and give feedback accordingly.

Answers:

i. Find a word in the text that means:

- Other people: **company**
- Enough: **adequate**
- Also: **plus**
- Things that you need to live and survive (e.g. water, electricity, clothes): **resources**
- Something that you put on your body to protect you from the sun: **suncream**
- Ugly, unpleasant and depressing (for places and things): **grim**
- With beautiful views of nature: **scenic**
- On the other hand (a conjunction which is used to compare things): **whereas**
- Choose: **pick**
- With well-defined muscles: **ripped**
- Your life story written down: **(your) memoirs**

ii. James persuades Jess to change her mind. But how exactly does he do it? Read the transcript very carefully to answer this question.

- Jess and James listen to each and express interest in their ideas
- They work together to explore advantages and disadvantages of both options
- They ask each other questions
- They challenge each other

iii. Which is the most common modal auxiliary verb in the text? Why does it appear so many times?

- 'Would' (including its written contracted form 'd)
- This is the most common way to mark situations that are not real (i.e. hypothetical)

iv. How many second conditionals can you find in the text?

- "... if you were in prison, you'd have company ..." (James)
- "If you were on a desert island, you'd be left alone." (James)
- "Well, it would be fun if you had adequate resources." (James)
- "If I had enough books, I would definitely choose a desert island." (Jess)
- "...if you were on a desert island, it would be nice and scenic." (Jess)
- "If you were in prison, you'd also get really ripped because you'd probably ..." (Jess) "... you'd work out all the time." (James)

Note: as you go over these second conditional sentences, model the sound of the contracted would (e.g. "you'd have company"; "I'd definitely choose a desert island") and get your students to repeat the sounds for themselves.

9. Tell students that they are going to discuss some more "Would you rather ...?" questions. On the board or screen write the following:

Would you rather be able to speak English at C2 level or 8 languages at A2 level?

10. **Planning for fluency:** Give students around 3 minutes to think silently about what they are going to say without making notes.

- Students should focus on the main ideas and points that they want to make – accuracy is not so important at this stage.
- Let students use dictionaries to look up any words that they will need.

11. Tell students that when they discuss the question, they should try to reach an agreement (i.e. a consensus decision) just as Jess and James do. Negotiate a time limit for the speaking (3 minutes, for example) and then put students into pairs to discuss the question. As they do so, you can circulate between pairs and make notes for feedback (see next page).

12. Find out who decided what. Ask students to share the ideas that they discussed and give language feedback when possible (see next page).

13. Ask students to change partners. Tell students that with their new partners, they are going to discuss the same question as before.

14. **Planning for accuracy:** As before, give students around 3 minutes to think silently about what they are going to say without making notes.

- This time, rather than thinking about what they are going to say, they should mentally rehearse how they are going to say it.
- Let students refer to the video transcript in the worksheet and look for any words, phrases, markers or structures that they would like to use.

15. Ask students to discuss the same question as before but this time with their new partner. Again, they should try to reach a consensus. As before, you can give a time limit for the discussion. Then invite students to share their ideas and give feedback accordingly.

16. From here, you can repeat the process for the following questions:

Would you rather be the world's best singer or the world's best dancer?

Would you rather have money or fame?

Would you rather be able to fly or make yourself invisible?

Would you rather walk to work naked or eat a sheep's eye ball?

Feedback options

Feedback is an important part of any speaking task and there are a number of questions that teachers should consider:

- How much feedback should be corrective and how much should be non-corrective? (Non-corrective includes praise, encouragement and other kinds of positive feedback.)
- Should feedback be delayed or immediate?
- Should we focus on what students said or what they didn't say? (I.e. What they avoided as a result in gaps in their knowledge.)
- Should feedback come from the teacher or from peers?
- Which errors should we correct?
- Which correction techniques should we use? For example, should we reformulate what a student has said and give them the correct version? Or should we look for ways to allow students to self-correct?

Some suggestions for this activity:

- **Not just grammar:** Would-you-rather questions create a context for talking about hypothetical situations. As a result, feedback will invariably involve a focus on the use of 'would' and the second conditional. However, do not limit your feedback to the grammar. When we do so, we can miss out on valuable opportunities to work on other areas such as vocabulary and pronunciation.
- **Language upgrades:** Look for opportunities to give students language upgrades. For example, instead of saying "People would hear you walking" you can ask a student to say, "People would hear your footsteps."
- **Mobile devices:** At some time in this activity, encourage students to use their mobile phones to record their spoken performances (on audio or video). Later, give them time to listen back and analyse their language before repeating the task.

Less is more

There are many books, boardgames and websites with would-you-rather themes. These may seem like an attractive option for the language classroom. They would allow you to bring hundreds of would-you-rather questions into your lesson. Other teachers might like to let students get creative and think of their own questions in preparation for this activity.

But do not assume that more is better. Personally, I would always prefer to make use of just 5 or 6 questions as this lesson plan does. And importantly, at any one time, everyone in the class will be discussing the same question.

There are at least two reasons for doing this:

- Assuming that you use this activity with more than one group of students, you will become familiar with the sort of things that people say in response to the questions. This can be very valuable when offering feedback – particularly for language upgrades (see above).
- If everyone is discussing the same question, it allows us all to be "on the same page". This is also important when taking feedback into account.

Part one

In the video, Jess and James discuss a question and share opinions. Watch the video and answer the following questions.



- i. What was the question at the start of the video?
- ii. How does James answer the question?
- iii. How does Jess answer the question?
- iv. One person persuades the other person to change their mind. Who persuades who?
- v. What do you think Jess and James' relationship is?

Part two

Read the video transcript below and then answer the questions on the next page.

James: Oh, a month in prison, definitely.

Jess: Why?

James: Because if you were in prison, you'd have company for a start. It would only be a month long and you'd get adequate care taken of you. If you were on a desert island, you would be left alone. You wouldn't have that.

Jess: But that would be fun.

James: Well, it would be fun if you had adequate resources.

Jess: If I had enough books, I would definitely choose a desert island.

James: What about water and food?

Jess: Well, yeah. Hmm ... I wouldn't be very good at that.

James: Plus, you would have to think about sunscreen, you know. You get books in prison.

Jess: Then I'll sit in the shade. I don't know. Hmm ...

James: What would be the problem with prison for you?

Jess: It would just be a bit grim. Like, at least if you were on a nice island, it would be nice and scenic.

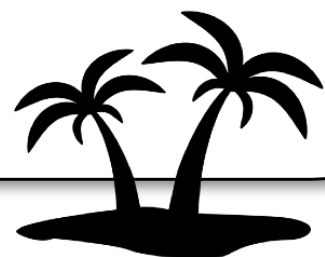
James: Yeah. And you'd feel like a free person.

Jess: It'd be like a holiday. But then you wouldn't see anyone for two years and would probably go crazy.

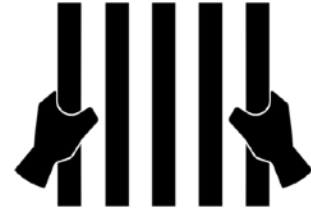
James: Two years is quite a long time ...

Jess: Yeah

James: Whereas one month is ...



Jess: Maybe I'd pick prison as well.
 James: Yeah
 Jess: If you were in prison, you'd also get really ripped because you'd probably ...
 James: ... you'd work out all the time.
 Jess: Yeah
 James: Yeah, that's true.
 Jess: Really ripped and really intelligent.
 James: Yeah. Well, you'd only have a month.
 Jess: And you could write your memoirs.
 James: You'd only have a month, Jess.
 Jess: Oh yeah



i. Find a word in the text that means:

- Other people: _____
- Enough: _____
- Also: _____
- Things that you need to live and survive (e.g. water, electricity, clothes): _____
- Something that you put on your body to protect you from the sun: _____
- Ugly, unpleasant and depressing (for places and things): _____
- With beautiful views of nature: _____
- On the other hand (a conjunction which is used to compare things): _____
- Choose: _____
- With well-defined muscles: _____
- Your life story written down: _____



ii. James persuades Jess to change her mind. But how exactly does he do it? Read the transcript carefully to answer this question.

iii. Which is the most common modal auxiliary verb in the text? Why does it appear so many times?

iv. How many second conditionals can you find in the text?