

MR. ARABLE AND THE RUNT PIG

Language Arts

Grade 3

OBJECTIVES

CONTENT

Students will learn to think about story characters in terms of their character traits and actions

THINKING SKILL/PROCESS

Students will learn to think about options and the likelihood of the consequences of those options in making decisions.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

CONTENT

Students read part of a story, use background information, work in collaborative learning groups to share information, and record it in a graphic organizer. The book *Charlotte's Web* is needed.

THINKING SKILL/PROCESS

An explicit thinking map, a graphic organizer, and structured questioning emphasize options, consequences, and reasons in decision making. (See pp. 39–43 for reproducible diagrams.) Collaborative learning in groups of four enhance the thinking.

LESSON

INTRODUCTION TO CONTENT AND THINKING SKILL/PROCESS

- **Think about a time when you had to make a decision and you weren't sure what to do. Tell your partner what you were thinking about doing.** Give students enough time for both students in each pair to relate their decisions. If necessary, prompt the class to switch roles in order to give each partner a chance to relate his or her decision.
- **Let's hear some of the examples you just discussed.** Ask for three or four examples from the class. Write each decision at the top of a column under the word "Decisions."
- **When thinking about what to do, your thinking is called "decision making." The different choices you were thinking about are called "options."** Write "Decision Making" and "Options" on the board. Under the word "options," list the alternatives that students mention.
- **Now tell your neighbor what you decided to do and how you figured it out. What did you think about to pick the best thing to do?**
- **When people are trying to decide what to do, they sometimes think about what will happen as a result of their decision. These results are called the "consequences" of their options. What were some of the consequences you were thinking about?** Write the word "consequences" on the board, and list some of the consequences students mention.
- **In making decisions, you should have a good reason for expecting particular consequences.** Write the word "reason" on the board.
- **Tell your neighbor your reasons for thinking that your decision would have the consequences you mentioned.** Ask the students to mention some reasons, and list these on the board under "reasons."
- **After you think about which of the consequences are important, you are ready to make the**

best choice. Here's a thinking map putting all of these ideas together. It tells us what we should think about when we are trying to make a decision. Show a copy of the thinking map at the right.

- We've been thinking about our own decisions. Now, think about decisions that were made by characters in stories you've read. Describe some of those decisions. Get three or four examples from the class.
- As we read stories, we can understand the characters better by thinking about why they made their decisions. We're going to read part of a story. As we do, we're going to think about a decision that one of the characters is trying to make and what that decision tells us about the kind of person that character is.

SKILLFUL DECISION MAKING

1. What makes a decision necessary?
2. What are my options?
3. What information is there about the consequences of each option?
4. How important are the consequences?
5. Which option is best in light of the consequences?

THINKING ACTIVELY

- I'm going to read the first few pages of the book *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White. Listen for the decisions that the characters make in this passage.

"Where is Papa going with that ax?" said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.

"Out to the hoghouse," replied Mrs. Arable. "Some pigs were born last night."

"I don't see why he needs an ax," continued Fern, who was only eight.

"Well," said her mother, "one of the pigs is a runt. It's very small and weak, and it will never amount to anything. So your father has decided to do away with it."

"Do away with it?" shrieked Fern. "You mean kill it? Just because it's smaller than the others?"

Mrs. Arable put a pitcher of cream on the table. "Don't yell, Fern!" she said. "Your father is right. The pig would probably die anyway."

Fern pushed a chair out of the way and ran outdoors. The grass was wet and the earth smelled of springtime. Fern's sneakers were sopping by the time she caught up with her father.

"Please don't kill it," she sobbed. "It's unfair."

Mr. Arable stopped walking.

"Fern," he said gently, "you will have to learn to control yourself."

"Control myself?" yelled Fern. "This is a matter of life and death, and you talk about controlling myself." Tears ran down her cheeks and she took hold of the ax and tried to pull it out of her father's hand.

"Fern," said Mr. Arable, "I know more about raising a litter of pigs than you do. A weakling makes trouble. Now run along!"

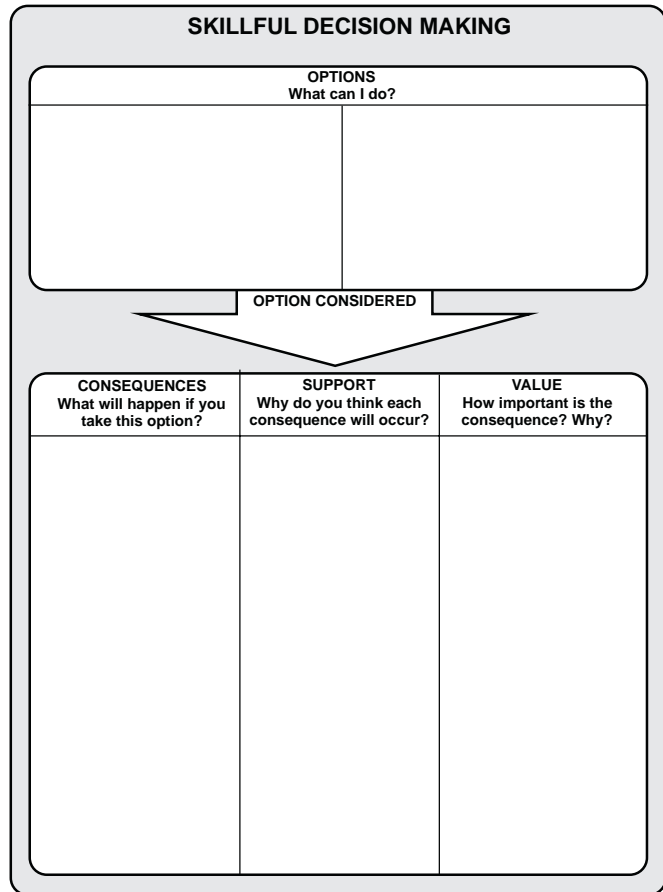
"But it's unfair," cried Fern. "The pig couldn't help being born small, could it? If I had been very small at birth, would you have killed me?"

Mr. Arable smiled. "Certainly not," he said, looking down at his daughter with love. "But this is different. A little girl is one thing, a runty pig is another."

"I see no difference," replied Fern, still hanging onto the ax. "This is the most terrible case of injustice I have ever heard of."

- **What decisions do the characters make in this passage?** POSSIBLE ANSWERS: *Mr. Arable’s decision to kill the runt pig, Fern’s decision to try to get her father to spare the pig, Fern’s decision to grab the ax, Mr. Arable’s decision to reason with Fern, Fern’s decision to try to convince her father, Mrs. Arable’s decision to tell Fern what her father plans.*
- **Let’s think about Mr. Arable’s decision to kill the runt pig. Suppose you were Mr. Arable and that what Fern says makes you think again about what to do about the runt pig. Let’s look at the decision-making map and ask the first question: What makes a decision necessary? Why do you think Mr. Arable feels he has to make a decision here?** POSSIBLE ANSWERS: *A litter of pigs was born last night. One of the pigs was a runt. Mr. Arable remembers how much trouble raising a runt pig has caused in the past. It may cost a lot of money to care for the runt pig. Fern has raised questions about whether killing the pig is the best thing to do.*

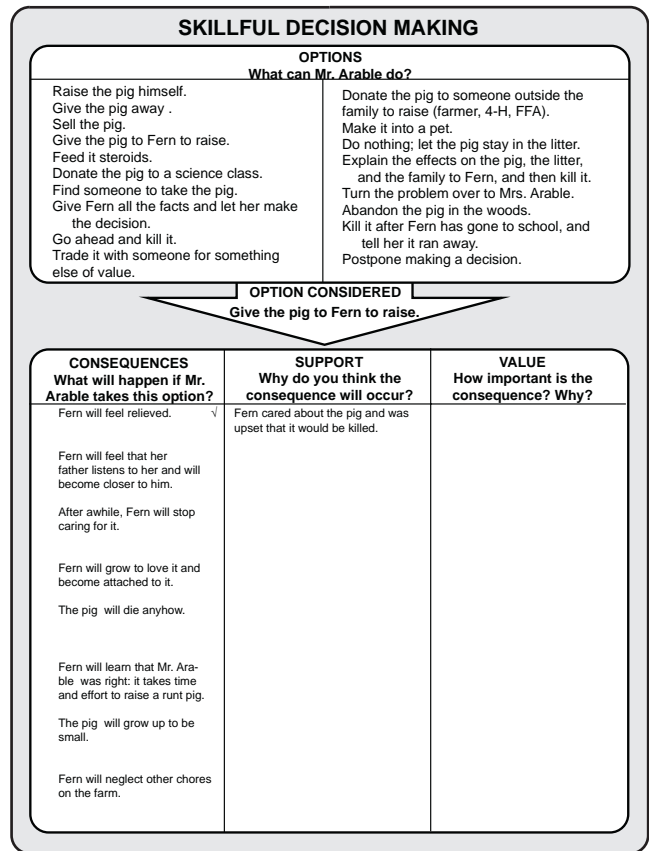
- **Now let’s look at the next question: What are Mr. Arable’s options? What else could he do? We will use a special diagram that can help us think more carefully about decision making. It has a box for “Options.” Work together in groups of three or four and try to come up with as many options as you can. Try to think of different kinds of options, including some unusual ones, and write them on the diagram.** POSSIBLE ANSWERS: *Take care of the pig himself, give the pig away, sell the pig, let Fern take care of the pig, lie to Fern and kill it anyway, do nothing (let the pig fend for itself), advertise for someone who can take care of the pig, make it a pet, kill it anyway, abandon the pig in the woods.*



- **Tell us one option from your group’s list.** As each group of students responds, write these on the board or on a transparency of the diagram under the word “Options.” Then ask for volunteers to add options that haven’t been mentioned. As you list responses, ask for elaboration of some by the students who offer them.
- **Let’s follow the decision-making map and think about the consequences of one of the options: giving the pig to Fern to raise. We should think about the consequences of our options so that we can decide which option is best. What might be the consequences of giving the pig to Fern to raise? Write “Give the pig to Fern to raise” under “Option Considered.” Then list consequences that might result if Mr. Arable did that. Make sure you think about consequences for others as well as for Mr. Arable and about both long-term and immediate consequences.** Ask the students for suggestions about the consequences, and fill in the graphic organizer as they give them. POSSIBLE ANSWERS. *Fern will be relieved. The pig will die anyhow. Fern will learn how hard it is to keep an animal alive. Fern will be able to keep the pig alive. Fern will feel that her father values her ideas. Fern will learn farm responsibility. Raising the pig will take Fern away from other chores on the farm, and pig care could become time consuming and expensive for the family. The pig*

may live and grow normally. Fern will learn about death. Fern will understand the wisdom behind her father's decisions. The parents may disagree over the decision. Pig care may come back to the parents. Mr. Arable may feel guilty about giving Fern the responsibility if the pig dies. The pig may breed other small pigs.

- Remember how important it is to make sure that you have reasons for thinking the consequences will really happen. Let's think about the first consequence—that Fern will be relieved. What do we know about Fern from the story that is a reason for thinking she will be relieved if her father gives her the pig to raise? We'll write that in the "Support" column on the diagram. Since we have a reason that supports it, we'll put a check mark next to the consequence. If you can't find a reason or if there is a reason against thinking the consequence will happen, we'll cross out the consequence. Write what the students suggest on the graphic organizer. As you fill in student responses, your organizer should resemble the one at the right.
- Now work in your groups to come up with the consequences for another option. Assign one group to finish discussing this option and complete the diagram. Let each of the other groups pick another option. Write down what you think the consequences might be for your option. Then see if you can find reasons for thinking the consequences will really happen. You can use information from the story or what you know about animals, farms, and people. Cross out any consequences for which you can't find support. After five minutes, ask the groups to report by telling what the option is and whether the reasons show that the consequences are likely.
- In your groups again, think about whether each likely consequence counts in favor of or against the option you have chosen. Put a plus next to the consequence if it counts in favor of the option; use a minus if it counts against the consequence; if the consequence is important, circle it, and explain why it is important in the last column on the diagram.
- Now pick what you think is the best thing for Mr. Arable to do. Explain why. Ask each group to report. After the discussion, ask the class to vote on the best thing to do.
- We've done some decision making by thinking carefully about what Mr. Arable should do. Let's read the rest of this chapter of *Charlotte's Web* to see what Mr. Arable decides to do. When you find out, think about what Mr. Arable's decision tells us about the kind of person he is. Write down two words or phrases that describe Mr. Arable. Read the rest of the chapter aloud. Ask a number of students to report on their descriptions and why they chose these. POSSIBLE ANSWERS: *Fair, thoughtful, listens to Fern, kind, open-minded.*



THINKING ABOUT THINKING

- **How did you think about what Mr. Arable should do? What did you think about first, second, and so on?** POSSIBLE ANSWERS: *Options first, then consequences, then evidence about how likely the consequences were, and then what the best thing to do is.*
- **Look at the thinking map of decision making. Is that a good way to describe how you thought about what Mr. Arable should do?** ANSWERS VARY, BUT STUDENTS GENERALLY AGREE THAT IT IS.
- **Is this a good way to make a decision when you're not sure what to do? Is it good to do this even when you feel pretty confident about your choice? Is it better than the way you think about your decisions now? Why?** ANSWERS VARY.
- **Can you write down a plan for your decisions to help you remember what you should think about? Draw your own thinking map and use some words that you learned in this lesson.**

APPLYING THINKING

Immediate Transfer

- **Later in the chapter, we found out that Fern's younger brother saw the runt pig at breakfast the next morning and asked for a pig to raise, too. Use your plan for decision making and decide what is the best thing for Mr. Arable to do.**
- **Think about the decision you discussed with your partner before we talked about Mr. Arable. Think through that decision using your decision-making plan. Would your decision now be the same as the one you made earlier? Why or why not?**

Reinforcement Later

Later on in the school year, introduce additional transfer activities.

- **In social studies, we've been studying about the Pilgrims' decision to leave Europe and come to the New World. Use your plan for decision making to think through whether or not they should leave Holland.**
- **We will be studying about pollution in science. Litter in the school is one type of pollution. Use your plan for decision making to think about how to keep the school free from litter.**
- **Think about a decision that you have to make sometime soon. Use your plan for decision making to think it through the same way. How can you remind yourself to think about decisions in this way when you have to make them?** SUGGESTION: *Write a note to yourself.*

ASSESSING STUDENT THINKING ABOUT DECISIONS

To assess student thinking about decisions, ask students to consider the school littering problem, or ask them to think through a personal decision. Ask your students to make their thinking explicit as they consider the best option. Determine whether they are attending to each of the steps in the thinking map for decision making.

Sample Student Responses • Mr. Arable and the Runt Pig

SKILLFUL DECISION MAKING

OPTIONS

What can Mr. Arable do?

Raise the pig himself.
 Give the pig away.
 Sell the pig.
 Give the pig to Fern to raise.
 Feed it steroids.
 Donate the pig to a science class.
 Find someone to take the pig.
 Give Fern all the facts and let her make the decision.
 Go ahead and kill it.
 Trade it with someone for something else of value.

Donate the pig to someone outside the family to raise (farmer, 4-H, FFA).
 Make it into a pet.
 Do nothing; let the pig stay in the litter.
 Explain the effects on the pig, the litter, and the family to Fern, and then kill it.
 Turn the problem over to Mrs. Arable.
 Abandon the pig in the woods.
 Kill it after Fern has gone to school, and tell her it ran away.
 Postpone making a decision.

OPTION CONSIDERED

Give the pig to Fern to raise.

CONSEQUENCES What will happen if Mr. Arable takes this option?	SUPPORT Why do you think the consequence will occur?	VALUE How important is the consequence? Why?
+ Fern will feel relieved. ✓	Fern cared about the pig and was upset that it would be killed.	Important. Feelings are important but are short term results.
+ Fern will feel that her father listens to her and will become closer to him. ✓	She was the only one who spoke on behalf of the pig to Mr. Arable; he took her feelings seriously.	Very Important. The relationship between a father and daughter is long term. Love is most important.
- After awhile, Fern will stop caring for it.	Raising runt pigs requires time and care. Fern is young and seems impulsive but cares about the pig.	Important. She may feel guilty, but may also learn from this.
+ Fern will grow to love it and become attached to it. ✓	Fern is young, cares a lot for the pig, and feels strong emotions.	Very Important. Loving is the most important relationship.
- The pig will die anyhow.	It's hard to raise a runt pig. However, it isn't ill, and Fern will give it special attention.	Important. The pig is a living being and life is important, but it would not have died of neglect.
+ Fern will learn that Mr. Arable was right: it takes time and effort to raise a runt pig. ✓	Fern is intelligent, observant, and interested in the pig, but small baby animals need much care.	Very Important. It is valuable to learn the realities of farm life and respect for her father's opinions.
- The pig will grow up to be small. ✓	Smaller baby pigs usually make small adults.	Not Very Important. Small pigs bring less money, but size can be overcome.
- Fern will neglect other chores on the farm.	Fern's age, school work, and chores probably don't leave much time for the pig. However, she is concerned and seems responsible.	Important. Fern's help on a family farm is important but not necessary.

Sample Student Responses • Mr. Arable and the Runt Pig

SKILLFUL DECISION MAKING

OPTIONS

What can Mr. Arable do?

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OPTION CONSIDERED

Kill it after Fern has gone to school and tell her it ran away.

CONSEQUENCES What will happen if Mr. Arable takes this option?	SUPPORT Why do you think the consequence will occur?	VALUE How important is the consequence? Why?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fern will find out and will lose trust for her father. ✓ - Fern will learn to lie. - Fern will fear for her own safety. - Future communication with her father will be changed. ✓ - Mr. Arable will feel guilty. ✓ + Fern will not find out and will forget about it. - Fern will cry. ✓ + The problem of caring for the runt pig will be solved; time and effort will be saved. ✓ 	<p>Fern is persistent, observant, and emotionally attached to the pig. Fern has a sense of justice and is sensitive to right and wrong.</p> <p>Fern is young but is sensitive to right and wrong.</p> <p>Fern is young and she feels a kinship with the pig, but her father has a caring relationship with her.</p> <p>Fern and her parents seem to be honest with each other. Lying and distrust limit communication.</p> <p>Mr. Arable spoke honestly with Fern and seems sensitive.</p> <p>Although Fern is young, she may not forget about something that she is so upset about.</p> <p>Fern is young and emotionally attached to the pig.</p> <p>Mr. Arable's experience raising pigs lets him understand the likelihood of survival and requirements for care.</p>	<p>Very Important. Fern's relationship with her father is life-long and very important for her development.</p> <p>Important. People won't trust her.</p> <p>Important. Can cause fright and distress.</p> <p>Very Important. Communication is important in a family.</p> <p>Important. Mr. Arable may feel uncomfortable about it.</p> <p>Important. She will be satisfied, and she will no longer challenge Mr. Arable.</p> <p>Not Very Important. She may be unhappy, but she will get over it.</p> <p>Important. Effort and time are costly on a small farm. It may save the family from having to make scarifices later.</p>