

Miles River Sail and Power Squadron

St. Michaels Middle School Boating Safety Program

Session 7: Culminating Activity

(Case Studies: Judgement)

Objective: Students will use concepts learned in the six sessions of the workshop to make appropriate decisions for boating safety and practice.

The two case studies each have three parts: a Summary of the circumstances, the Outcome and Discussion Points.

With the students divided up into small discussion groups (perhaps 12 each), the discussion leader should first hand out the summary for one of the cases, after making introductory comments. (If feasible, each group can be further divided into two or three smaller groups to facilitate discussion among the students.)

The students should be given a brief time to discuss the summary among themselves.

After the students have time to read and briefly discuss the first summary, the discussion leader should hand out the “Outcome” for the case.

The discussion leader should then lead a discussion; covering each of the “Discussion Points.”

Bring up any issues in the Discussion Points that are not brought up by the students.

Proceed to the next case.

Discussion Leader Introductory Comments

The cases to be discussed are based on true stories. They are actual events with only the names changed.

Discuss the procedure to be followed (as above).

Encourage active participation, comment and questions.

Duck Hunting

Charlie was a high school and college athlete. Now 20 years old, he is in good physical condition and enjoys the outdoors.

It is January and very cold. Along with two friends of his own age (Mike and Alex) Charlie is planning to go duck hunting in a cove off a large river on the Chesapeake Bay's Eastern Shore. The surrounding area is low marsh land. Charlie and Alex are going to use a canoe and Mike will be in a kayak.

It is windy and the Coast Guard has issued small craft warnings. None of the three hunters have life jackets, but they have warm clothing and do not plan to go far offshore.

Duck Hunting (Outcome)

Charlie and Alex died in the cold waters of the cove where they were hunting when their canoe was driven offshore by strong winds and capsized.

Their friend Mike tried to help them from his kayak but couldn't. The best he could do was to get ashore and call for help. It was too late and it took several days to find the bodies. Newspaper articles described the grief of their families and friends and commented on the fact that they were not wearing life jackets.

Duck Hunting (Discussion Points)

Considering the weather conditions, was it wise to undertake the hunting trip? Was it even an acceptable risk?

Were the canoe and kayak suitable vessels for hunting? Considering the weather conditions, were they suitable to go out in for any purpose?

If either vessel overturned, is it likely that the other could have helped much?

Was it wise to go out without life jackets?

Did Charlie and Alex likely die from drowning or from hypothermia?

Would life jackets have helped? (In very cold water and probably with a soft mud bottom, Charlie and Alex could have died from hypothermia before they could get ashore even in relatively shallow water. It is possible that life jackets would have served no purpose other than making it easier to find the bodies.)

Party Boat

Jerry is a young professional with a good job and a high income. He has a lakefront condo and a nice runabout boat. Life is good.

It's a holiday weekend and several friends come to visit. They spend the afternoon boat-riding, water skiing, enjoying a cook-out and having a few beers. Late in the day, most of the guests leave but Lori and Daryl stay and another friend, Denise, arrives.

Jerry suggests that the four of them run the boat across the lake to have dinner at a local spot. The weather is calm and clear and it will be a straight shot back when they're ready to come home. Jerry isn't concerned because there is plenty of room for his friends to stay overnight at his condo. That way, no one has to drive a car. Even though it will be dark, the shoreline and dock are well lighted.

Denise doesn't know much about boats, but she has some misgivings about going across the lake for dinner after the others have had an afternoon of partying. However, the weather is beautiful and Jerry is familiar with the area and seems to know what he is doing. He says the run back will be quick and easy. Denise doesn't want to spoil the fun, so she sets her concerns aside and goes along.

They enjoy a good dinner, shoot some pool and have a few more beers while talking about old times. At about 10 PM, they decide to wrap it up and head back.

Party Boat (Outcome)

After a fast crossing with everyone singing and laughing, Jerry is about to slow down to approach his dock. Daryl says he thinks they are little too far up the shore. Jerry agrees and starts to make a turn.

Three days later he wakes up in a hospital, breathing through a tube with his mouth wired shut. He can talk enough to ask what happened when one of his friends who went home that day comes to visit him. He tells Jerry that he ran into an unlit dock at a condo near his own. It's hard for him to tell Jerry that Denise has had surgery to relieve the pressure on her brain and has a broken back. She faces a long rehab period. Lori is also severely injured. When Jerry asks about Daryl, his friend has to tell him that Daryl is dead.

During a long period of recovery, Denise constantly wonders why she set her concerns aside and agreed to go on the boat. She tells herself that she should have said something. Maybe it would have changed things.

After Jerry recovers from his injuries, he writes a letter to a boating magazine to tell his story so that others can learn from it. He has been convicted of BUI (Boating Under the Influence - otherwise known as drunk), manslaughter and two counts of bodily injury. His letter is postmarked at the state prison where he is serving 5 years.

Party Boat
(Discussion Points)

When are a “few beers” too many?

Is any consumption of alcohol wise when you are operating a boat and responsible for the safety of others?

Were there factors that could have magnified the effect of the alcohol (e.g., fatigue from physical activity, heat and boat noise and motion)?

Was it wise to operate the boat at a high speed when nearing the shore? Was it wise to do so in the darkness, even on open water?

On a dark body of water with numerous lights on the shore, does this affect your orientation and distance perception?

What other hazards could exist on open water in the dark?

Since Denise had not been drinking when she arrived, could she have been better able to make a good judgment about the trip across the lake (and perhaps have influenced the others)?