

**"Gentlemen Your Verdict"**

By Michael Bruce

A. Vocabulary:

proverbial – reference to a proverb or idiom

coxswain – one who steers a vessel

tender – a supply ship to service or tend other ships

B. Short Story Elements (10 marks)

Answer all of the following questions on a separate sheet of paper in complete sentences. Make sure to include all the key words of the question in your answer.

1. From what point of view is "Gentlemen Your Verdict" told? What are the advantages in telling the story from this perspective? /2
2. Describe the atmosphere and setting of the story. /1
3. The author uses a particular device to tell a significant part of the story. Identify this device and explain what effects are gained by structuring the story in this manner. /2
4. Explain the term "dilemma" in your own words. What is the dilemma Oram is faced with? What is his decision? What moral judgment does he make? /3
5. What is the theme of the story? /2

C. Comprehension Questions (8 marks)

6. Identify the characters that have given testimony in court. /2
7. Identify the inciting (complicating) incident. What caused the incident? /2
8. How does Oram respond to the explosion and damage to the submarine? /1
9. The damage to the sub is a serious problem for the crew, but several other factors complicate the situation. What are these factors? /2
10. What realization causes Oram to "sit staring blindly" for nearly a minute? /1

Total: /18

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## Reflective Assignment

**Is Captain Oram guilty of murder, or is he a hero?**

You will be writing a personal paragraph based on the question above. Give your answer and be sure to explain your reasoning. This is a personal persuasive piece so you are welcome to use "I" when writing. You will be showcasing your strength of reasoning and critical thought.

When you write, focus on the moral issue, and not the details. Follow the example of the story and do not get bogged down in ideas like, 'if only he had more time to think he could have opened a hatch'. Do you sympathize with the Captain's decision? Are you outraged? Should the survivors have been chosen based on something else?

**Due: Wednesday Feb. 5<sup>th</sup> in class.**

**Student Samples Activity:**

Sample	Strengths	Weaknesses	Mark / 10
Student A			
Student B			
Student D			
Student E			
Student F			

Student E:

In his short story, "Gentlemen, Your Verdict," Michael Bruce presents the reader with a moral dilemma: is it ever right for one man to kill many in order to save few? Bruce strongly suggests throughout the short story that we are to side with the heroic Lieutenant-Commander Oram and agree that it is in fact morally right to play God in certain circumstances. While I do in fact support the Lieutenant-Commander's decision to save five men by killing the others, I do believe this decision should not hinge on the fact that all the men were "brave and good." Bruce leads the reader to defend Oram by describing the men as "good" and "brave" (23). I would certainly question Bruce's characterization of the men more closely. If the men were indeed all "good" and "brave", why did Oram not trust them with the reality of their situation and invite them all in on the decision making process? I believe Bruce leaves this option out of the plot because it is only human nature to react to such circumstances with chaos and anarchy; in which case, were the men really "good" and "brave" with nothing to differentiate between them except families? Doubtful. Regardless of the moral nature of the men, I still agree with Oram's decision to save five men, but I do not approve his methods of choosing which men live and which die, because I do not believe that all men are simply "good" and "brave" but that they are differentiated by something deeper and more meaningful: their own moral centre.

Student F:

I read this article once about an experiment. It was about a scientist who puts a cat in a box with a bomb and closes the lid. The bomb would only detonate if the lid was opened, so there was no way of knowing if the was in the box was still alive or dead; but the cat, now in the box, was doomed to die. Either someone would open the box and boom, the cat dies, or no one opens the box and the cat dies of thirst. So, the scientist deemed that the cat was both dead and alive at the same time. Now that baffled me. How could anything be both dead and alive at once? Now, after reading "Gentlemen, Your Verdict," I understand it a bit better, because the sailors too were in a similar predicament of being both dead and alive at the same time. They could even be considered, by the same logic, already dead.

Back to the question: is it a crime to kill a dead man? Well, the judicial system doesn't seem to agree with me, and would say it is a crime. So, if you want to be technical, then yes, he did, in fact, kill those fifteen men. But the real question is: was his decision "right"? Well, imagine for a second that we are all amoral cyborgs with no emotion, thinking on a purely logical spectrum. Let's weight the situation, shall we? Lieutenant Oram could have let 20 men die of suffocation, and they all would have died. Died together at lead, but dead is still dead. Or, he could save five men and kill fifteen. So look 0/20 or 5/20, which is better? You have to admit a 25% survival rate versus a 0% survival rate sure seems a lot better.

But if we take morals into account, we knock the entire thing onto its head. People start screaming about right and wrong, but the numbers still stay the same. He brought five men back from the dead. I think that is pretty amazing, but you have to decide for yourself.

"Gentlemen, Your Verdict" by Michael Bruce

Student Samples

Student A:

This is a story about decisions. The result of this decision was the death of fifteen crew members. A decision made by one person to end the lives of fifteen men to save five. What would you do if you were the lieutenant of a submarine and you had to decide the fate of your crew? I don't think that I could make the same decision that Lieutenant-Commander Oram made. After the submarine rested on a sandbank, about thirty fathoms down, it was time to assess the damage. The propellers were gone, the hatches were jammed, the radio was damaged ... " They were trapped for good. They were all going to die. The Captain is a hero for saving five men.

Student B:

Captain Oram could have justified keeping himself alive because the survivors would need a leader. Certainly, this altruistic act of self-sacrifice truly reveals Captain Oram as an excellent commanding officer with a heart. Moreover, he also had to make the immediate decision of who should be saved. This shows how difficult it was for him as a human being to poison fifteen men which included himself. This is not a quick decision made by a cold-hearted man. If the men with families died, their children would be orphaned, and their wives would be widowed. After ordering Lieutenant Paull to get out the four bottles of whisky and to send the five married men to himself, he still called the shore station one last time before carrying out the most dreadful part of his plan. Instead of saving his favourites or the more skillful ones, he chose the men with families. By saving those men, he prevented these family tragedies from happening.

Student D:

'Gentlemen Your Verdict' by Michael Bruce, is if sometimes in life, it is okay to kill, or let someone die to ensure the survival of others'. Also who is more important to be saved when there are only limited numbers of people who can survive. Is it those who are married and possibly have kids, or others who are younger but are not yet married' In this story the captain of a submarine plays the role of 'god' which many would consider as wrong and others as right. He is put in a situation where he needs to kill 15 people of his crew to ensure the survival of at least 5.