

# Critical Challenges

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

## Sample Critical Challenge

### *Doing our share*

Taken from  
**I Can Make a Difference**

#### Authors

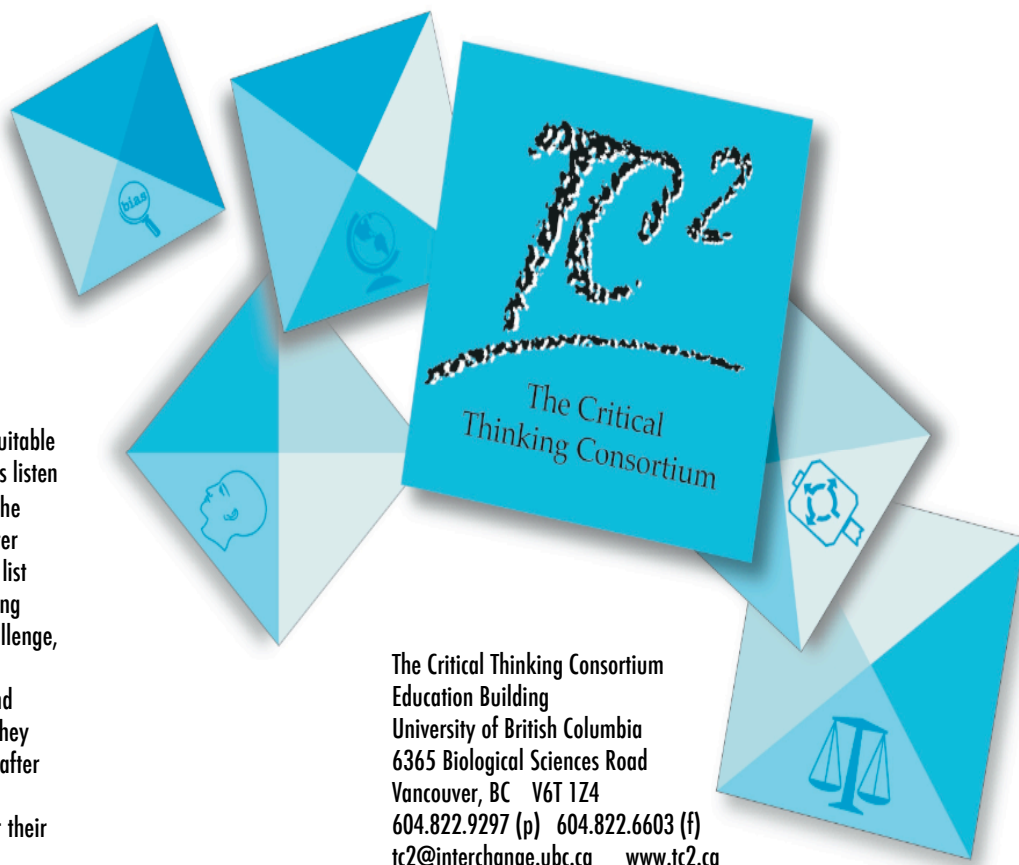
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#### Synopsis

In this two-part challenge, students explore the equitable allocation of household or classroom jobs. Students listen to a story, *Piggybook* by Anthony Browne, where the mother is responsible for all household chores. After discussing the unfairness of this situation, students list jobs done at home and develop criteria for assigning responsibility for these jobs. In the first critical challenge, students use these criteria to allocate jobs in an imaginary family or in their own family. The second challenge invites students to decide on a new job they will undertake at home or at school. A week or so after assuming their new tasks, students report on their experiences and receive a note of appreciation for their efforts.



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# Doing our share



## Critical Challenge

**Critical tasks**

- A. Determine how household jobs could best be shared among five imaginary (or actual) family members.
- B. Decide on a household (or classroom) job that would be most appropriate for you to do.

**Overview**

In this two-part challenge, students explore the equitable allocation of household or classroom jobs. Students listen to a story, *Piggybook* by Anthony Browne, where the mother is responsible for all household chores. After discussing the unfairness of this situation, students list jobs done at home and develop criteria for assigning responsibility for these jobs. In the first critical challenge, students use these criteria to allocate jobs in an imaginary family or in their own family. The second challenge invites students to decide on a new job they will undertake at home or at school. A week or so after assuming their new tasks, students report on their experiences and receive a note of appreciation for their efforts.

## Objectives

**Broad understanding**

All members share responsibility for maintaining a family or classroom community. Fairness is an important consideration in determining how jobs should be allocated.

**Requisite tools**

**Background knowledge**

- knowledge of household or classroom tasks
- knowledge of abilities of family members



**Criteria for judgment**

- criteria for sharing workload (e.g., fair, able to do, safe)



**Critical thinking vocabulary**



**Thinking strategies**

- data chart



**Habits of mind**

- fair-mindedness



# Suggested Activities

## Preview book

### Pre-planning

- We recommend using the book *Piggybook* by Anthony Browne to introduce this challenge (see References). It tells of a family where the mother does all the household jobs and works outside of the home, while the father and two sons, who see themselves as very important people, contribute nothing. After mother leaves home, the father and sons find themselves unable to look after themselves, finally becoming aware of their unfairness to the mother. When the mother returns, all members share in the family responsibilities. If this book is not readily available, you may choose to use another book with a similar theme to introduce the challenge.

## Introduce the story

### Session One

- Before reading the story *Piggybook*, ask students what it means to give someone a piggyback (carry them on your back). Do students think it is easy to give a piggyback to a large person or to a few people at one time? Display the book cover. Invite students to describe the scene. (The mother is carrying the father and two sons on her back; illustrations inside the book portray the family turning into “pigs” after mother leaves and returning to humans when the uneven workload is resolved). Ask students what is unusual about the cover picture. What might it mean that the mother is carrying everyone on her back? Why might this be a problem? Explain to students that they are going to learn about the problem and how the mother solved it. Read the story to the class.

## Debrief the story

- After reading the story, ask students if mother really carried father and the two children on her back. Invite students to discuss why the author has shown mother carrying her family on her back. Clarify that everyone understands why the mother left. Discuss whether it was fair that the mother carried such a heavy load of the family chores.

## Re-read story

- Re-read the story to assist the class in compiling a list of all the household jobs mentioned. After creating the list, write the names of the family members in the story across the top to create a chart such as the one indicated on the following page. Invite students to identify which jobs were completed by each family member after the mother returned. Place check marks in the appropriate columns. Ask students whether the sharing of workload in the Piggott family was better at the beginning or the end of the story. As an aside, draw students’ attention to the fact that at the end of the story it is not clear who had assumed the jobs of vacuuming the carpets and washing the clothes. Discuss with students who should do these jobs.

### Sharing jobs at home

| Jobs               | Mother | Father | Sons |
|--------------------|--------|--------|------|
| Wash dishes        |        | ✓      | ✓    |
| Make the beds      |        |        | ✓    |
| Vacuum the carpets |        |        |      |
| Wash the clothes   |        |        |      |
| Iron the clothes   |        | ✓      |      |
| Cook the meals     | ✓      | ✓      | ✓    |
| Fix the car        | ✓      |        |      |



data chart

#### Identify criteria

- Ask students to suggest the factors they would consider in deciding which household jobs should be done by each family member. Help them think about the criteria for assigning household tasks by posing obviously unsound suggestions such as the following:

- What is wrong with making one person do everything?
- What might be wrong with deciding that the youngest family member should fix the car?
- What would be wrong with asking a tiny baby to cut up the vegetables with a sharp knife?

Guide students in recognizing the following criteria for allocating household tasks:

- *should be fair* (not too much or too little for anyone);
- *person is able to do it* (what people can do or could learn to do);
- *is safe for the person to do* (what people can do without being hurt or feeling afraid).

Write the key words (e.g., *fair*, *able to* and *safe*) on chart paper.

#### Practice applying criteria

- Announce to the class that you are trying to decide whether or not to assign jobs to specific students. You would like the class to help you decide if your choices are good ones. Direct students to indicate a “thumbs up” if giving the student the job would meet each of the agreed-upon conditions, and a “thumbs down” if it would not meet each condition. After each example listed on the following page, ask students three questions: “Would (student’s name) be able to do it?” “Would it be safe for him/her to do it?” and “Would it be fair to make him/her do it?” Alter the order of these questions so that the obviously unmet criterion is raised last for each proposed assignment.



criteria for sharing workload

**Applying criteria**

| <b>Proposed assignment</b>  | <b>Obviously unmet criterion</b> |
|---|----------------------------------|
| • What if I gave (student’s name) the job of cleaning up a mess made by (different student’s name)?   | not fair                         |
| • What if I gave (student’s name) the job of moving my desk to another room?  | not able to do it                |
| • What if I asked (student’s name) to get a book from the very top shelf but he would have to stand on top of boxes that could easily fall? | not safe                         |

**Anticipate next class**

- Announce that next session, students will decide the household chores that members of an imaginary family should be carrying out. But to do this, the class will need a list of the jobs required to maintain a home. Each student’s “homework” is to think of two household chores.

**Session Two**

**List family jobs**

- Ask students to share with the class their two household chores. Down the side of a piece of chart paper or the chalkboard, list these jobs. If needed, add jobs from the *Piggybook*.



*knowledge of household tasks*

**Introduce imaginary family**

- Ask students to pretend that they are part of an imaginary family. They are to decide how the identified list of household tasks should be shared among family members. Introduce the family: Me (the student), Father, Mother, Big Brother and Little Sister. If you would prefer a less traditional family composition, substitute members by replacing, for example, a parent for an aunt or a grandfather. As suggested below, create a chart by listing the five family members across the top. Initially, focus on the two criteria of “able to” and “safety.” Explain that not everyone in the family is able to do all of the jobs safely. For example, the Little Sister may not be able to mow and rake the lawn but, even if she is only four years old, she may be able to help set the table safely. For each job, discuss with students which family members are able to do the task safely. Place a check mark in the appropriate columns. Make it clear that students are simply identifying who could do the job safely, not who will have to do the job.



*knowledge of family abilities*

### Who is able to do these family jobs safely?



data chart

| Jobs               | Me | Father | Mother | Big Brother | Little Sister |
|--------------------|----|--------|--------|-------------|---------------|
| Wash dishes        |    |        |        |             |               |
| Dry dishes         |    |        |        |             |               |
| Cook meals         |    |        |        |             |               |
| Set table          |    |        |        |             |               |
| Clear table        |    |        |        |             |               |
| Dust the furniture |    |        |        |             |               |
| Vacuum the floor   |    |        |        |             |               |
| Wash clothes       |    |        |        |             |               |
| Iron clothes       |    |        |        |             |               |
| Fold laundry       |    |        |        |             |               |
| Cut lawn           |    |        |        |             |               |
| Rake lawn          |    |        |        |             |               |
| Take garbage out   |    |        |        |             |               |
| Feed pets          |    |        |        |             |               |
| Make beds          |    |        |        |             |               |

#### Introduce allocating the task

► After recording each family member's suitability for the identified tasks, invite students to consider how they might decide who should do any particular task. Point out that more than one person meets the two criteria for each job. Discuss whether it is fair to expect those who can do all of the jobs to carry them out. If needed, remind students of the unfairness of expecting the mother to do everything in the story *Piggybook*). Discuss how the class might decide who should be assigned different jobs. Suggest several options for students to consider:

- Would it be better if Big Brother or you had the job of taking out the heavy garbage can?
- Would it be better if Big Brother or you had the job of cleaning up your toys in your room?

Help students see how they might fairly allocate jobs among family members (e.g., assign jobs to members who are best able to do the job safely provided it is not unfair to expect them to do it).



knowledge of abilities

Present the first challenge

- Invite students to imagine that they have been asked to help this imaginary family (or, if you prefer, their own family) decide how to allocate household chores. If you want students to use their own family, suggest that each student identify five members even if this means, in the case of small families, adding relatives who may not be living in the same house or, in the case of large families, leaving out some family members. Introduce the critical task:

*Determine how household jobs could best be shared among five imaginary (or actual) family members.*

Explain the task

- Distribute an enlarged copy (11 x 17) of *Family jobs* (Blackline Master #1) to each student. Explain that five of the squares are for individual members of the imaginary or actual family. Inform students that in each of these five squares they are to record a family member's name (role), the job assigned to the person and the reason for assigning that job. Students are then to draw a picture of that family member doing the job. Remind students to use the criteria fair, able to do and safe when making their choices and to consider who would be the best person for each job. Encourage students to consult the class-developed chart for possible household chores. Direct students' attention to the sixth square on the bottom right of the paper. Point out that sometimes a job may be too big for one family member to do alone, but could best be done by a few people working together. In the last square, students are to draw a picture of two or more family members sharing a job. Students should record the family members' names, the job and the reason for assigning that job.

The form is titled "Family jobs" and is divided into six squares. The top-left square is labeled "Blackline Master #1" and contains the following text: "Family member: \_\_\_\_\_", "Job: \_\_\_\_\_", and "Because: \_\_\_\_\_". The top-middle square contains: "Family member: \_\_\_\_\_", "Job: \_\_\_\_\_", and "Because: \_\_\_\_\_". The top-right square contains: "Family members: \_\_\_\_\_", "Job: \_\_\_\_\_", and "Because: \_\_\_\_\_". The bottom-left square contains: "Family member: \_\_\_\_\_", "Job: \_\_\_\_\_", and "Because: \_\_\_\_\_". The bottom-middle square contains: "Family member: \_\_\_\_\_", "Job: \_\_\_\_\_", and "Because: \_\_\_\_\_". The bottom-right square contains: "Family members: \_\_\_\_\_", "Job: \_\_\_\_\_", and "Because: \_\_\_\_\_". On the left side of the grid, there is a vertical line labeled "Name: \_\_\_\_\_". On the right side, there is a vertical line labeled "12". At the bottom right, there is a small logo and the text "© 2005 The Critical Thinking Cooperative".

Justify decisions

- When students have completed Blackline Master #1, ask several to share them with the class explaining how their decisions satisfy the criteria. Discuss students' choices as a class. Pay particular attention to the fairness of the tasks that students assign themselves.



fair-minded





knowledge of classroom tasks

Introduce taking on a job

Select possible options

- Invite students to begin to think about assuming a suitable family (or classroom) task that they do not currently perform. Remind students of the unfairness of expecting some people to do more than their share. If your focus is on household chores, ask students to recall the jobs they assigned to members of the imaginary (or actual) family and to think of who does these jobs in their own families. If the focus is on classroom chores, brainstorm with the class the many student tasks needed for a classroom to run effectively. List these jobs on chart paper or on the chalkboard. Ask the class to consider whether each student could do more to help out in the classroom.

- If students agree to take on a new chore at home or in the classroom, provide each student with an enlarged copy (11 x 17) of *Jobs I can do safely* (Blackline Master #2). Ask students to think of four new jobs that they might take on (in school or at home) using the previously developed chart for possible tasks. Students are to record the name of the task on the line at the bottom of each box and check off if they are able or could learn to do the task safely. Students should draw pictures of the tasks in the boxes.

The form is titled "Jobs I can do safely" and is labeled "Blackline Master #2". It features a 2x2 grid of boxes. Each box has a line at the bottom for writing a task name and two checkboxes labeled "Safe" and "Able". Below the grid, there are three lines for writing: "The job I will do is", "I think this is the most fair job for me because", and "Student commitment". At the bottom right, there is a line for "Teacher/parent approval" and a logo for "The Critical Thinking Cooperative".

Present the second critical task

- When students have recorded four possible jobs, they are ready to choose the one that they will agree to assume. Present the second challenge:

*Decide on a household (or classroom) job that would be most appropriate for you to do.*

Instruct students to write the selected job at the bottom of the page and explain why it is the fairest job for them to take on (i.e., does not require too much or too little of the student). If students don't see how large tasks can be fairly allocated, suggest that everyone might share some duties (e.g., everyone can contribute to a clean classroom by cleaning up around his or her space) and other duties may be taken on for a short time (e.g., rotate the jobs each day or so). Ask students to write or print their name on the bottom of the Blackline Master to confirm that they will try to complete their identified chore. Before they start their new task, ensure that students obtain approval from



their parents (if a household chore) or from you (if a classroom chore). Explain to students that in a week they will have an opportunity to talk about how they have managed with their new job.

## Session Five

## Blackline Master #3

### Follow-up on commitment

- After a week or so, invite students to tell the class about the job they chose and their success in carrying it out. Ask students to reflect upon the difficulties in doing the job. If some students have been unsuccessful, you may want to encourage them to select another job and try again. Invite students to comment on how their efforts have been received at home. You may want to use *Star helper* (Blackline Master #3) so that you or the child's parents may show appreciation for each student's efforts.

**Star helper** Blackline Master #3

Dear: \_\_\_\_\_

You are a star helper  ★★★  
 ★★  
 ★

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| ★★★<br>You are a three-star helper because you have done your new job perfectly. | ★★<br>You are a two-star helper because you have done your new job even if it hasn't worked out as planned. | ★<br>You are a one-star helper because you tried to do your new job even though you were not able to. |
|--|---|---|

The best thing about your help is \_\_\_\_\_

One thing that might make helping even better is \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your effort,

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## Evaluation

## Blackline Master #4

### Assess job choices

- Assess students' ability to assign jobs that are reasonable and fair using the rubric *Assessing job sharing* (Blackline Master #4). The sources of evidence and the three criteria for this assessment are listed below:

- use students' drawings on *Family jobs* (Blackline Master #1) and *Jobs I can do safely* (Blackline Master #2) to assess their ability to judge suitable chores;
- use the chores that students select for themselves on *Family jobs* (Blackline Master #1) and

**Assessing job sharing** Blackline Master #4

|   | Prerecognition  | Partial recognition  | Basic understanding   | Extended understanding   | Sophisticated understanding   |
|---|---|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Judges suitable chores</b>                       | Does not understand what is asked when invited to judge the suitability of a chore for an individual. | Understands what is asked, but has difficulty correctly judging the suitability of chores for very obvious situations. | Judges the suitability of obvious chores for an individual, but cannot explain why they are suitable. | Judges the suitability of obvious chores for an individual and offers a very simple explanation why they are suitable. | Judges the suitability of obvious chores for an individual and explains in own words why they are suitable.   |
| <b>Recognizes the fairness of an assigned chore</b> | Does not understand what is meant by a fair sharing of chores.  | Understands what is asked, but has difficulty recognizing a fair sharing of chores even in very obvious situations.    | Recognizes a fair sharing of chores in very obvious situations without explaining why they are fair.  | Recognizes a fair sharing of chores in obvious situations and offers a very simple explanation why they are fair.      | Recognizes a fair sharing of chores across a range of situations and explains in own words why they are fair. |
| <b>Selects a personal chore</b>                     | Unable to choose a personal chore to assume.  | Chooses a personal chore to assume that does not meet the criteria for a sound choice.                                 | Chooses a predictable personal chore without any explanation.   | Chooses a reasonable personal chore and offers a simple explanation.   | Chooses a reasonable personal chore and explains in own words why it is a sound choice.                       |

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Jobs I can do safely* (Blackline Master #2) to assess their ability to recognize the fairness of an assigned task and their ability to personally select a chore.

Reaching the “basic understanding” level on the rubric may be appropriate for many primary students.

## References

Browne, Anthony. (1986). *Piggybook*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. (ISBN 0-3994-88416-7)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Family jobs

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Family member: _____</p> <p>Job: _____</p> <p>Because: _____</p> | <p>Family member: _____</p> <p>Job: _____</p> <p>Because: _____</p> | <p>Family members: _____</p> <p>Job: _____</p> <p>Because: _____</p> |
| <p>Family member: _____</p> <p>Job: _____</p> <p>Because: _____</p> | <p>Family member: _____</p> <p>Job: _____</p> <p>Because: _____</p> | <p>Family members: _____</p> <p>Job: _____</p> <p>Because: _____</p> |

# Jobs I can do safely

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> Safe <input type="checkbox"/> Able | <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> Safe <input type="checkbox"/> Able |
| <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> Safe <input type="checkbox"/> Able | <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> Safe <input type="checkbox"/> Able |

The job I will do is \_\_\_\_\_

I think this is the most fair job for me because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student commitment

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher/parent approval

# Star helper

Dear: \_\_\_\_\_

★★★  
 You are a star helper  ★★  
 ★

| ★★★   | ★★  | ★  |
|---|---|--|
| You are a three-star helper because you have done your new job perfectly. | You are a two-star helper because you have done your new job even if it hasn't worked out as planned. | You are a one-star helper because you tried to do your new job even though you were not able to. |

The best thing about your help is \_\_\_\_\_

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---

One thing that might make helping even better is \_\_\_\_\_

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Thank you for your effort,

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# Assessing job sharing

|   | <b>Pre-recognition</b>  | <b>Partial recognition</b>   | <b>Basic understanding</b>  | <b>Extended understanding</b>  | <b>Sophisticated understanding</b>  |
|---|---|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Judges suitable chores</b>                       | Does not understand what is asked when invited to judge the suitability of a chore for an individual. | Understands what is asked, but has difficulty correctly judging the suitability of chores for an individual even in very obvious situations. | Judges the suitability of obvious chores for an individual, but cannot explain why they are suitable. | Judges the suitability of obvious chores for an individual and offers a very simple explanation why they are suitable. | Judges the suitability of obvious chores for an individual and explains in own words why they are suitable.   |
| <b>Recognizes the fairness of an assigned chore</b> | Does not understand what is meant by a fair sharing of chores.  | Understands what is asked, but has difficulty recognizing a fair sharing of chores even in very obvious situations.                          | Recognizes a fair sharing of chores in very obvious situations without explaining why they are fair.  | Recognizes a fair sharing of chores in obvious situations and offers a very simple explanation why they are fair.      | Recognizes a fair sharing of chores across a range of situations and explains in own words why they are fair. |
| <b>Selects a personal chore</b>                     | Unable to choose a personal chore to assume.  | Chooses a personal chore to assume that does not meet the criteria for a sound choice.   | Chooses a predictable personal chore without any explanation.   | Chooses a reasonable personal chore and offers a simple explanation.   | Chooses a reasonable personal chore and explains in own words why it is a sound choice.                       |

Comments:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_