

# Kate's Choice

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*Kate's Choice* (available from [www.thinking-together.org.uk](http://www.thinking-together.org.uk) and included on the CD which accompanies this Focus pack) is an example of software designed by us to promote talking, learning and thinking within a curriculum area – that of PHSE and Citizenship. We have also been working with software in Maths and Science and had very good results. The PHSE and Citizenship curriculum emphasises the importance of discussion and of considering the perspective of others in reaching moral decisions. The aim of the *Kate's Choice* software is to encourage reflection about moral issues through stimulating exploratory talk about the conflict between personal morality (loyalty to a friend) and social morality (stealing is a crime). All the design principles given above were applied. There were potentially complex problems embedded in a narrative structure; decisions taken by the group made a real difference to the outcome of the story. This was achieved by using an interactive

## MAPE



story in which different choices led to different consequences for the characters. Arguments for use in discussion are displayed on the screen when choices need to be made. Typing is kept to an absolute minimum. The story is that Kate's friend Robert tells her a secret after first asking her to promise not to tell anyone else. His secret is that he has stolen some chocolates from Mrs Cook's shop but he says he has stolen them as a present for his mother who is in hospital. Kate then has to decide whether she tells her parents or not. If she does not tell she comes under pressure from various people and is even accused of stealing the chocolates herself. If she does tell on Robert the police are called in and things do not look good for him. At the point where we join them (Figure 1), a group of children who have done the Talk Lessons described earlier were asked by the computer software to reflect on the decisions they had made and, all the different opinions of the different characters in the story were made available through icons of their heads which could be clicked on.

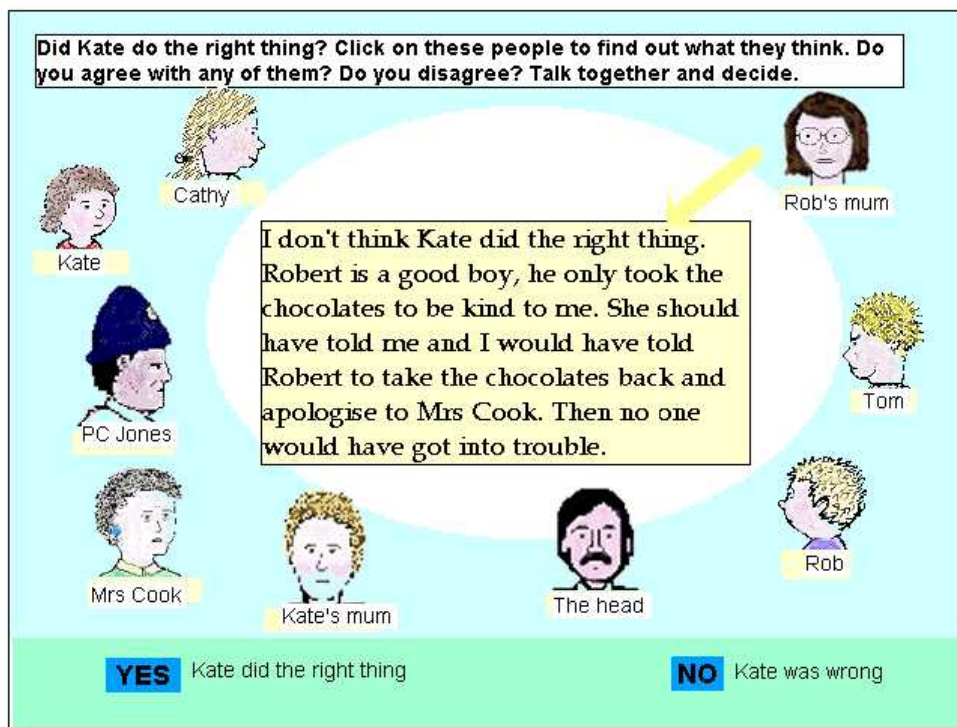


Figure 1. *Did Kate do the right thing?*

<sup>1</sup>Writing on behalf of an Open University based research team including Lyn Dawes, Neil Mercer and Claire Sams.

Transcript extract of children talking around *Kate's Choice*:

[*Computer initiation*: 'Did Kate do the right thing? Click on these people to find out what they think. Do you agree with any of them? Do you disagree? Talk together and decide'.]

*Kath* [Clicks on Rob's mum and then reads the screen text shown in Figure 1] 'I don't think Kate did the right thing, Robert is a good boy. He only took the chocolates to be kind to me'.

*Alan* No I don't agree.

*Kath* I don't agree with that –

*Alan* That's just wrong.

*Kath* Robert's Mum should be on Mrs. Cook's side really.

*Alan* Yeah. She should be more strict.

*John* Next round. Kate's Mother. [Clicks on Kate's mum]

*Alan* OK [reads from screen] 'Kate did the right thing to tell. She should not lie to me or hide things from me. I am her Mother'.

*Kath* Alright John – you go first this time

*John* I think that's alright actually, because if you don't tell her, and her mother finds out she's going to get really done because she ain't told her mum.

*Kath* Yeah, then Kate's Mum will go round to Rob's Mum's house and say 'You did this and you did that and your son is a bad influence to my daughter.'

*Alan* 'Cos he stole

*Kath* But that's wrong as well. I know Kate *should* have told her Mum – and that's what she did, but if Kate didn't tell her Mum, then Rob's Mum would sort of fall out with Kate's Mum because I think Rob's Mum and Kate's Mum are friends so I think Kate's Mum is right. I agree with Kate's Mum.

*Alan* Yes. I think about Kate's Mum – and it's also good for Kate, because she'll have a really guilty conscience and she'll feel really upset inside. And she'll-

*Kath* And it will all start to bubble up inside her and she'll just have to tell somebody.

*Alan* And Rob, I think if he doesn't get told now what's right and what's wrong, when he gets older he's going to get into a lot more trouble than just a box of chocolates.

*Kath* Yes – in older life there's no second chances. He'd better start learning.

We can see from the transcript that this very simple software interface, with a prompt, some resources to explore and then a choice of two responses, has provoked real thinking that is directed, by the program itself, towards realising curriculum aims. Talking around the computer gives the children a chance to practice the general talking and thinking skills that they have learnt in order to learn something together within the curriculum. Here they take up a position in relation to a range of opinions and so practice and develop their own moral voice. In this short extract they are seen to take moral responsibility for decisions using their own reasoning as a basis for criticising one adult's opinion while supporting that of another.

#### *Further information*

Dawes, L., Mercer, N. and Wegerif, R. (2000) *Thinking Together: A programme of activities for developing thinking skills at KS2*. Questions Publishing.

Mercer, N. (2000) *Words and Minds: How we use language to think together*. London: Routledge.

Wegerif, R., and Scrimshaw, P. (Eds.). (1997). *Computers and Talk in the Primary Classroom*. Clevedon: Multi-Lingual Matters.

<http://www.thinkingtogether.org.uk>