

The Alchemist's Choice: The Ethical Pledge

(Year 7 - Ages 12-13)

Lesson 6 of 9

Teacher Preparation

Introduction for Teachers

This lesson tackles one of the most debated topics in bioethics: Consent Systems. In the adult world, this is the debate between "Opt-in" (you must sign up) and "Opt-out" (you are automatically signed up unless you refuse).

For Year 7s, we simplify this by framing it as "The Volunteer vs. The Draft."

- Opt-in (Australia): You are a Volunteer. You step forward. It is a heroic choice.
- Opt-out (Some other countries): You are Drafted. You are included by default.

The goal is not to decide which is "better" globally, but to understand why Australia uses the Opt-in system. We value the "Gift" aspect of donation. A gift must be freely given, not taken by default.

Safety and Sensitivity Considerations

- Avoiding Political/Legal Complexity: Keep the discussion focused on the principle of choice, rather than getting bogged down in complex legislation.
- Respecting Other Systems: Some students may know that countries like Spain or Wales use "Opt-out" (Presumed Consent) and have high donation rates.
 - Strategy: Acknowledge this is valid! "Different cultures view the body differently. In Australia, we prioritize the family's certainty, which comes from knowing their loved one wanted to do it, not just that they didn't say no."
- The "Lazy" Myth: Students might ask, "If Opt-out saves more lives, why don't we do it?"
 - Answer: It's not that simple. Even in Opt-out countries, doctors still ask the family. If the family is surprised or angry because they didn't know, they still say no. Trust is the most important ingredient, and Opt-in builds trust.

Teacher Resources

- Scenario Cards: (Included in Lesson Plan) Two simple scenarios about joining a school club.
- Visual Aid: A T-Chart on the board: "Active Choice (Opt-in)" vs "Passive Default (Opt-out)".
- Prop: A "Pledge Scroll" (just a piece of paper rolled up) to represent the weight of a promise.



Key Concepts & Language for Teachers

- 1. Opt-in (The Australian Way)
 - Definition: You are NOT a donor unless you actively say "Yes" (join the Register).
 - The Metaphor: "The Volunteer."
 - The Pro: It proves you really wanted to do it. It is 100% your choice.
 - The Con: People are busy/lazy and forget to sign up, even if they support it.
- 2. Opt-out (Presumed Consent)
 - Definition: You ARE a donor unless you actively say "No" (join a refusal register).
 - The Metaphor: "The Default."
 - The Pro: Captures everyone who "doesn't mind."
 - The Con: Someone might become a donor who didn't want to be, just because they didn't understand the paperwork. This can cause anger for families.
- 3. The "Ethical Pledge"
 - Why do we call it a Pledge?
 - A decision made in secret is just a thought.
 - A decision shared with others is a Pledge.
 - In Australia, because the family has the final say, the Pledge (telling them) is actually more powerful than the legal system.

The Alchemist's Data: The Power of Choice (Year 7)

- The "Nudge" Theory Behavioural scientists found that humans usually take the "path of least resistance."
 - If the box says "Tick to Subscribe," few people tick it.
 - If the box says "Tick to Unsubscribe," few people tick it.
 - We tend to stay with the default.
 - Discussion Point: Is it "heroic" to donate just because you were too lazy to tick a box? Or is it more heroic to make the effort to sign up?
- The Trust Factor Countries with "Opt-in" systems often report higher levels of public trust in the medical system because people feel their autonomy is respected. They know doctors won't touch them unless they gave explicit permission.

