The Legacy Code: The Altruism Paradox

(Year 9 - Ages 14-15)

Lesson 1 of 9

Lesson Summary

This 60-minute introductory lesson for Year 9 launches "The Legacy Code" unit. It moves beyond the simple definition of kindness to explore the Science and Strategy of Altruism.

Students will engage with "The Altruism Paradox"—the evolutionary puzzle of why humans help strangers even at a cost to themselves. Using a Game Theory simulation (The Prisoner's Dilemma or "Split or Steal"), students will investigate the tension between Self-Interest and Cooperation. They will discover the neuroscience behind the "Helper's High" (Dopamine/Oxytocin) and identify Organ and Tissue Donation as the ultimate form of "High-Stakes Altruism"—a rational, prosocial choice that strengthens the fabric of humanity.

Learning Intentions

Students will .....

- Define Altruism through the lens of Evolutionary Psychology and Game Theory.
- Investigate the "Neuroscience of Giving" (how the brain rewards prosocial behaviour).
- Analyze the difference between Reciprocal Altruism (expecting a return) and Pure Altruism (donation).
- Evaluate why high rates of altruism (like donation) create stronger, safer societies ("The Social Contract").

Success Criteria

Students can .....

- Explain the "Altruism Paradox" (Why do we help if it doesn't seemingly benefit our survival?).
- Identify the role of Dopamine and Oxytocin in the "Helper's High."
- Apply Game Theory logic to explain why cooperation is a better long-term strategy than selfishness.
- Categorize Organ Donation as a unique form of "Pure Altruism" (helping a stranger without direct reward).

Lesson Details

Time:	60 minutes
Year Level:	Year 9 (Ages 14-15)
Unit:	This is Lesson 1 of 9 in the series.
Educational Partner:	This lesson is adapted from resources provided by DonateLife

General Capabilities

Critical and Creative Thinking (Logic/Game Theory); Ethical Understanding; Personal and Social Capability; Scientific Literacy.

Curriculum Mapping and Links

Australian Curriculum (v9.0)

Subject	Strand	Content Descriptor
Science	Science Understanding (Biological)	AC9S9U02: Analyze how body systems coordinate and regulate function... (Focus: The Nervous/Endocrine system's reward pathways for social behaviour)
Health and Physical Education	Personal, Social and Community Health	AC9HP10P09: Critique behaviours and community actions that impact health and wellbeing. (Focus: The impact of altruism on community health)
Civics and Citizenship	Knowledge and Understanding	AC9HS9K04: The role of political parties and... how citizens participate in Australia's democracy. (Focus: Active citizenship and social responsibility)

Queensland Curriculum (QCAA)

Subject	Syllabus	Content Description
Science	Year 9	Multi-cellular organisms rely on coordinated and interdependent internal systems (Brain/Hormones).
Health and Physical Education	Year 9	Evaluate the impact of social and cultural factors on health decisions.
Civics and Citizenship	Year 9	How citizens can influence government and society (Social Capital).

Resources Required

- Whiteboard/Smartboard.
- Video Hook: A clip of the "Split or Steal" game show or a summary of "The Prisoner's Dilemma."
- Resource: "The Neuro-Cards" (Cards explaining Dopamine, Oxytocin, and Serotonin).
- Student Worksheet: "The Game Theorist's Logbook."
- Prop (Optional): A bag of chocolates/tokens for the Game Theory simulation.

Skills

- Strategic Thinking (Game Theory).
- Scientific Literacy (Neuroscience/ Hormones).
- Ethical Reasoning (Utilitarianism vs. Altruism).
- Debating (Justifying cooperative behaviour).

Teacher Preparation

- Core Metaphor: "The Code." DNA is a biological code. Laws are a legal code. Altruism is the Social Code that keeps us from chaos. Without it, society crashes.
- Key Concepts:
  - Game Theory: The study of mathematical models of strategic interaction.
  - Reciprocal Altruism: "I scratch your back, you scratch mine."
  - Kin Selection: Helping family to protect genes.
  - Pure Altruism: Helping a stranger (Donation).
- The Hook: Prepare the "Split or Steal" game carefully. It engages 14-year-olds immediately because it involves risk, psychology, and potential "betrayal."

Additional Information

This lesson treats Year 9 students as young adults. It moves away from "being nice" (primary school) to "being smart" (high school). By framing Altruism as a survival strategy and a neurochemical reward, we make the concept of donation "cool" and rational, appealing to the teenage desire for logic and independence.