# Alligator River

**Aims**

To help you realise the different perceptions, values and attitudes people have even on common, everyday happenings. You will learn about the difficulties in finding consensus about value judgements and explore the reasons why we see people differently.

**Activity**

- Read the Alligator River Story.

- After reading the story (and without any discussion with your peers) rank the five characters in the story beginning with who you consider to be the most offensive and end with the one you consider to be the least objectionable. That is, the character that seems to be the most reprehensible to you, should be entered first, in the list following the story, then the second most reprehensible and so on, with the least reprehensible or objectionable character being entered in the fifth space. Write down alongside your rankings, the reasons as to why you ranked the characters in the way that you did.

- Form groups as assigned by your lecturer.

- Each group should:

  - Elect a spokesperson for your group.

  - Record in the table provided how your group ranked each of the characters in the story (Frequency table).

  - Examine the reasons as to why the characters got the rankings they did. What is the primary reason why each member of the group ranked individuals in the order that they did?

  - Now try to arrive at a group consensus on the rankings. If you can reach a consensus, be prepared to tell the class later, the basis on which you arrived at the agreement and what the final rankings were. If no consensus can be reached, explore what were the main reasons that blocked a consensual ranking? Be prepared to discuss this with the class later and share your final rankings.

- Reassemble for discussion when specified by your lecturer. The spokesperson from each group should indicate the group's results and ranking.

- The lecturer will then facilitate discussion concerning the ease at which consensus was reached and the reasons why we see people differently.

**Read the Alligator River story**:-

"Once upon a time there was a woman named Abigail who was in love with a man named Gregory. Gregory lived on the shore of a river. Abigail lived on the opposite

shore of the river. The river that separated the two lovers was teeming with man-eating alligators. Abigail wanted to cross the river to be with Gregory. Unfortunately, the bridge had been washed away by a heavy storm the previous evening.

"So she went to ask Sinbad, a riverboat captain, to take her across. He said he would be glad to if she would consent to go to bed with him before he takes her across. She promptly refused and went to a friend named Ivan to explain her plight. Ivan did not want to be involved at all in the situation.

"Abigail felt her only alternative was to accept Sinbad's terms. Sinbad fulfilled his promise to Abigail and delivered her into the arms of Gregory.

"When she told Gregory about her amorous escapade in order to cross the river, Gregory cast her aside with disdain. Heartsick and dejected, Abigail turned to Slug with her tail of woe. Slug, feeling compassion for Abigail, sought out Gregory and beat him brutally. Abigail was happy to see Gregory getting his due. As the sun sets on the horizon, we hear Abigail laughing at Gregory."

| Rank | Name | Reasons |
|--------|------|---------|
| First  |      |         |
| Second |      |         |
| Third  |      |         |
| Fourth |      |         |
| Fifth  |      |         |

| Frequency of being ranked | | | | | |
|---------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
| Character | First | Second | Third | Fourth | Fifth |
| Abigail |  |  |  |  |  |
| Gregory |  |  |  |  |  |
| Ivan |  |  |  |  |  |
| Sinbad |  |  |  |  |  |
| Slug |  |  |  |  |  |

**Ideas to be addressed in debrief and to extend discussion – see separate paper on 'Values and Beliefs'**

Ask for student opinion 'what are values, beliefs and attitudes?' 'How do these differ', 'Can we change them and how?'

More specific questions can be asked about the value judgements and why as human beings we make judgements on very little information.

- o Does a name influence our judgement, for example Slug? Can students think of names they would never call a new baby because once they knew someone by that name they did not like, or particular names have particular associations?

- o Do we have more sympathy with a character when we can relate to their experience, or recognise something about them or their behaviour as similar to our own?

- o Do these characters exist in the real world, for example is Sinbad just like another business man? He kept to his part of the contract so surely he is not all bad? Would we find these types of characters in organisations?

- o If we find such a range of characters in organisations and equally such variety in terms of value judgements how do we ensure organisations operate smoothly?

- o Can students think of any 'soaps' where we find similar characters to Abigail, Sinbad etc? Television 'soaps' are not real but do they reflect human experience? Why is a programme like 'The Office' so popular?

- o Abigail did something for love; does our view of love in a particular society excuse some types of behaviour?

- o Is a good friend someone who does not help you? What do we expect from friends? Slug uses violence to help Abigail but is this because he is acting like a friend?

- o We are not told anything about the race/nationality of the characters- would these influence judgements further?

- o Why do we stereotype? It is important to point out to a student that to stereotype is a normal part of the cognitive function of the brain – it helps us to categorise information. However what is not acceptable is when stereotypes result in behaviour that is prejudiced.

An important part of the debrief will also be to explore why some groups might have found it hard to agree on a common list and why others found it easier. How was consensus reached? Did anyone feel they just gave way but were still not happy? Who drove the process? How was influence used to win others over? What works/what does not?