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Australia's death row plea to Singapore

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22 November, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Australia's death row plea to Singapore

Australia's government is thinking about taking Singapore to the International Court of Justice to save an Australian drug trafficker from the death penalty. Death row prisoner Tuong Van Nguyen, 25, will be hanged on December 2. His crime was smuggling 396.2 grams of heroin into Singapore. Australian officials have repeatedly asked Singapore to reduce the death sentence to life in prison. However, all appeals have fallen on deaf ears. Singapore refuses to change its decision. An Australian foreign affairs spokesman said the hanging was terrible and accused Singapore of disrespecting Australia.

Mr. Nguyen was sentenced to death in March 2004. He said he carried the drugs to pay back US\$15,000 he borrowed from a friend. The loan was for his twin brother's legal fees. His brother was in court for drug offences three years earlier. Nguyen's lawyer thinks the UN Court of Justice offers some hope because it considers the death sentence for heroin possession as illegal. However, Singapore is not a signatory to the court and does not accept its authority. Australia's Prime Minister John Howard said it was a "desperately sad case". He also regretted he could not allow it to tarnish healthy relations with Singapore.

WARM-UPS

1. SINGAPORE SEARCH: Find out as much information as you can on Singapore. Talk to many other students. After you have finished, sit with your partner(s) and exchange information. What did you find out that surprised you? What did you hear that was very interesting?

2. DEATH PENALTY METHODS: In pairs / groups, talk about your opinion of these death penalty methods:

- Hanging
- Beheading / guillotine
- Firing squad
- Stoning
- Lethal injection
- Electrocution (the electric chair)
- Gassing
- Other

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Australia / Singapore / death penalty / drugs / traffickers / heroin / death row / hanging / deaf ears / life in prison / loans / lawyers / courts / sad things

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. DEATH ROW: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with death row. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

5. HELPING: Would you do ANYTHING if your partner, parents, siblings, best friends... REALLY needed your help? Would you risk your own life to save theirs? Which of the following would you do or not do to save someone you love?

- Smuggle heroin into Singapore
- Sell everything you own
- Take out a huge bank loan
- Rob a bank
- Sell photos of your body to a website
- Shoot someone
- Fight Mike Tyson
- Be a traitor to your country

6. DRUGS OPINIONS: Do you agree with these opinions on drugs and the death penalty? Talk about them with your partner(s).

- a. Anyone trafficking or selling drugs should be sentenced to death.
- b. There is no difference between hard and soft drugs. They are equally bad.
- c. One country cannot be allowed to kill the citizen of another country.
- d. All nations should sign an agreement banning the death penalty for drug crimes.
- e. Laws should be stricter because countries like Singapore are safe and crime-free.
- f. Drug traffickers help kill many drug addicts so they deserve to die.
- g. The death penalty is wrong for any crime.
- h. The leader of one country should have the power to stop its citizens being killed by another country.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. Australia wants Singapore to stop an Australian's death sentence. T / F
- b. An Australian is on death row for trafficking heroin into Singapore. T / F
- c. Australians have complained that Prime Minister John Howard is deaf. T / F
- d. An Australia spokesman said the hanging was understandable. T / F
- e. The man was helping his drug trafficking twin brother escape hanging. T / F
- f. The man's lawyer said a UN court would stop the death sentence. T / F
- g. Singapore is not a signatory to the UN International Court of Justice. T / F
- h. Mr. Howard will not let the case harm relations with Singapore. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------|
| a. thinking about | judgment |
| b. trafficker | member |
| c. repeatedly | very |
| d. decision | smuggler |
| e. accused | costs |
| f. borrowed | blamed |
| g. fees | considering |
| h. signatory | harm |
| i. desperately | loaned |
| j. tarnish | continually |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| a. save an Australian drug trafficker | relations with Singapore |
| b. His crime was | to death |
| c. all appeals have fallen | change its decision |
| d. Singapore refuses to | smuggling 396.2 grams of heroin |
| e. accused Singapore of | some hope |
| f. sentenced | on deaf ears |
| g. in court | heroin possession as illegal |
| h. the UN Court of Justice offers | disrespecting Australia |
| i. it considers the death sentence for | from the death penalty |
| j. allow it to tarnish healthy | for drug offences |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Australia's death row plea to Singapore

Australia's government is thinking about _____ Singapore to the International Court of Justice to _____ an Australian drug trafficker from the death penalty. Death _____ prisoner Tuong Van Nguyen, 25, will be hanged on December 2. His crime was _____ 396.2 grams of heroin into Singapore. Australian officials have _____ asked Singapore to reduce the death sentence to life in prison. However, all appeals have _____ on deaf ears. Singapore refuses to change its _____. An Australian foreign affairs spokesman said the hanging was _____ and accused Singapore of disrespecting Australia.

smuggling
terrible
save
fallen
taking
repeatedly
decision
row

Mr. Nguyen was _____ to death in March 2004. He said he carried the drugs to pay _____ US\$15,000 he borrowed from a friend. The loan was for his twin brother's _____ fees. His brother was in court for _____ offences three years earlier. Nguyen's lawyer thinks the UN Court of Justice offers some _____ because it considers the death sentence for heroin _____ as illegal. However, Singapore is not a signatory to the court and does not _____ its authority. Australia's Prime Minister John Howard said it was a "desperately sad case". He also regretted he could not allow it to tarnish healthy _____ with Singapore.

hope
relations
back
accept
drug
sentenced
possession
legal

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Australia's death row plea to Singapore

Australia's government is thinking about _____ Singapore to the International Court of Justice to _____ an Australian drug trafficker from the death penalty. Death row prisoner Tuong Van Nguyen, 25, will be _____ on December 2. His crime was smuggling 396.2 grams of heroin into Singapore. Australian officials have repeatedly asked Singapore to _____ the death sentence to life in prison. However, all _____ have fallen on deaf ears. Singapore refuses to change its decision. An Australian foreign affairs spokesman said the hanging was _____ and accused Singapore of disrespecting Australia.

Mr. Nguyen was sentenced to death in March 2004. He said he _____ the drugs to pay back US\$15,000 he borrowed from a friend. The loan was for his twin brother's _____ fees. His brother was in _____ for drug offences three years earlier. Nguyen's lawyer thinks the UN Court of Justice offers some _____ because it considers the death sentence for heroin possession as illegal. However, Singapore is not a signatory to the court and does not _____ its authority. Australia's Prime Minister John Howard said it was a "desperately sad _____". He also regretted he could not allow it to _____ healthy relations with Singapore.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'death'** and **'row'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "DRUGS" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about drugs, drug trafficking and the death penalty.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| • thinking | • March 2004 |
| • row | • fees |
| • crime | • hope |
| • repeatedly | • illegal |
| • deaf | • authority |
| • accused | • healthy |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What is your image of Singapore?
- c. Do you think Mr. Nguyen's execution should go ahead?
- d. What punishments do you think should be given for international drug smuggling?
- e. Do you think punishments should depend on the type and amount of the drugs trafficked?
- f. Do you think it's OK for Australia to ask another country to change its decisions to save a drug trafficker?
- g. Do you think Australia's Prime Minister should do more to save Mr. Nguyen?
- h. Are you surprised that a country like Singapore has the death penalty?
- i. Do you think Singapore is treating Australia with disrespect?
- j. When was the last time something you asked for fell on deaf ears?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. What are your feelings towards Mr. Nguyen?
- d. Do you think his twin brother should be executed instead?
- e. Would you smuggle drugs if someone you loved needed help?
- f. Do you think there should be special international laws for when one country wants to execute the citizen of another?
- g. Do you think this is a "desperately sad case" or a simple case of a drug smuggler getting the correct punishment?
- h. Do you think airports should be stricter in searching people for drugs to stop smugglers?
- i. What advice would you give to Australian Prime Minister Howard and Singapore's Prime Minister Lee over this case?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

DEATH ROW ROLE PLAY: Should Mr. Nguyen be hanged?

Team up with classmates who have the same role as you. Develop your roles and discuss ideas and “strategies” before the role play begins. Introduce yourself to the other role players.

Role A – MR. NGUYEN

You are very sorry for your actions. You have never used drugs in your life. You smuggled drugs into Singapore only to help your brother, not yourself. You have no criminal record. You understand you committed a crime and are prepared to spend life in prison in Singapore.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT DIE.

Role B – SINGAPORE LAWYER

The law is the law. It cannot be changed for one person. If you change the decision to hang Mr. Nguyen, Singapore’s legal system will be full of similar appeals. The whole world knows Singapore is very strict on drugs. Mr. Nguyen should have respected that. Singapore is a safe and clean country

THINK OF REASONS WHY SINGAPORE SHOULD STICK WITH THE HANGING.

Role C – AUSTRALIAN SPOKESPERSON

This is the 21st Century. You think it is terrible that countries still use the death penalty. Your Prime Minister has appealed directly to Singapore’s Prime Minister. That should be enough to save Mr. Nguyen and keep healthy relations. Mr. Nguyen can stay in an Australian prison.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY MR. NGUYEN SHOULD NOT DIE.

Role D – REFORMED HEROIN ADDICT

Your life was nearly destroyed because you were a heroin addict. You lived in hell for many years. You lost your family and friends. You stole money from your parents. You hate anyone who tries to smuggle drugs. You know the drugs will destroy many lives. You think Mr. Nguyen should definitely be hanged to send a strong message to other smugglers.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY MR. NGUYEN SHOULD BE HANGED.

Change roles and repeat the role play. Comment in groups about the differences between the two role plays.

Discuss what should happen to Mr. Nguyen.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on the case mentioned in the article. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. DRUG PENALTIES: Create a poster explaining your ideas for the different punishments that should be handed out for different drug offences. Are the punishments different for the type and amount of drugs and nationality of the smuggler? Explain what you wrote to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all have similar ideas?

4. DIARY / JOURNAL: Imagine you are Mr. Nguyen. Write your diary / journal entry for a day spent on death row. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. T c. F d. F e. F f. F g. T h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------|
| a. thinking about | considering |
| b. trafficker | smuggler |
| c. repeatedly | continually |
| d. decision | judgment |
| e. accused | blamed |
| f. borrowed | loaned |
| g. fees | costs |
| h. signatory | member |
| i. desperately | very |
| j. tarnish | harm |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| a. save an Australian drug trafficker | from the death penalty |
| b. His crime was | smuggling 396.2 grams of heroin |
| c. all appeals have fallen | on deaf ears |
| d. Singapore refuses to | change its decision |
| e. accused Singapore of | disrespecting Australia |
| f. sentenced | to death |
| g. in court | for drug offences |
| h. the UN Court of Justice offers | some hope |
| i. it considers the death sentence for | heroin possession as illegal |
| j. allow it to tarnish healthy | relations with Singapore |

GAP FILL:

Australia's death row plea to Singapore

Australia's government is thinking about **taking** Singapore to the International Court of Justice to **save** an Australian drug trafficker from the death penalty. Death **row** prisoner Tuong Van Nguyen, 25, will be hanged on December 2. His crime was **smuggling** 396.2 grams of heroin into Singapore. Australian officials have **repeatedly** asked Singapore to reduce the death sentence to life in prison. However, all appeals have **fallen** on deaf ears. Singapore refuses to change its **decision**. An Australian foreign affairs spokesman said the hanging was **terrible** and accused Singapore of disrespecting Australia.

Mr. Nguyen was **sentenced** to death in March 2004. He said he carried the drugs to pay **back** US\$15,000 he borrowed from a friend. The loan was for his twin brother's **legal** fees. His brother was in court for **drug** offences three years earlier. Nguyen's lawyer thinks the UN Court of Justice offers some **hope** because it considers the death sentence for heroin **possession** as illegal. However, Singapore is not a signatory to the court and does not **accept** its authority. Australia's Prime Minister John Howard said it was a "desperately sad case". He also regretted he could not allow it to tarnish healthy **relations** with Singapore.