

Self-Sacrifice in a Firehouse on 9/11

- **Compelling Question**
 - Why is self-sacrifice an essential virtue?
- **Virtue:** Self-Sacrifice
- **Definition** – Self-sacrifice is purposeful action exchanging personal loss for the good of others.
- **Lesson Overview**
 - In this lesson, students will review and analyze the self-sacrifice of the 40/35 Firehouse crew on 9/11. Students will consider how to demonstrate the virtue of self-sacrifice in their own lives. Students will achieve the following objectives.
- **Objectives**
 - Students will analyze the commitment, actions, and character of members of the 40/35 Firehouse crew on 9/11.
 - Students will understand why self-sacrifice is an essential virtue in their own lives.
 - Students will demonstrate self-sacrifice when faced with the choice of pursuing their own goals or pursuing even nobler goals.
- **Background**
 - In 1973, the World Trade Center (WTC) opened with its twin towers reaching over 1,300 feet in the air in the New York City skyline in the heart of the Wall Street financial district. On February 23, 1993, a large truck bomb was detonated under the WTC, killing six people and injuring more than a thousand. Radical Islamic terrorists fighting a jihad against the United States had attempted to use the dramatic event to kill tens of thousands of Americans. Over the next few years, several plotters were arrested and prosecuted.

The leader of one of the most important terrorist groups, al Qaeda, was Osama bin Laden, who masterminded deadly attacks on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 as well as a lethal attack on the *U.S.S. Cole* in 2000. He organized a plot to hijack American airliners and crash them into significant American landmarks recognized around the globe including the WTC, the Pentagon, and possibly the U.S. Capitol or White House.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, (9/11) nineteen members of al Qaeda boarded four jetliners in Boston (American 11 and United 175), Washington, D.C. (American 77), and Newark (United 93). After passing through security, the terrorists boarded the respective planes and took their seats near the front of the planes. Upon reaching cruising altitude, they used mace, knives, and box cutters to stab and incapacitate the flight attendants and passengers as well as force their way into the cockpits where they killed the pilots and took control of the aircraft. They proceeded to crash Flight 11 into the north tower of the World Trade Center in New York at 8:46 a.m. and Flight 175 into the south tower at 9:03 a.m., instantly killing everyone on board the planes and hundreds of people in the buildings. The terrorists who hijacked Flight 77 turned the airplane around and purposefully flew the plane into the Pentagon at 9:37 a.m. Finally, Flight 93 was hijacked and headed back towards Washington, D.C. Passengers used phones to call loved ones and discovered that other planes were being crashed into national landmarks presumably killing many thousands of Americans. There were only 33 passengers on board Flight 93, but they heroically decided to sacrifice themselves by rushing the cockpit and assaulting the terrorists to take back the flight and prevent a further mass killing. At 10:02 a.m., the plane was only 20 minutes from Washington, D.C. Just as the passengers were about to take control of the aircraft, it is believed that the terrorists piloting the flight chose to forcibly crash the plane. It exploded into the ground in an empty field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania at 580 miles per hour. While all this was happening, members of the American military, firefighters, police officers, and medical personnel were dispatched in all these locations to save every life possible regardless of the danger to their own lives.

- **Vocabulary**

- 9/11
- Al Qaeda
- World Trade Center
- Wall Street
- Terrorists
- Jihad
- Osama bin Laden
- Kenya
- Tanzania
- *U.S.S. Cole*
- Hijack
- Incapacitate
- Pentagon
- Manhattan
- Michael D'Auria
- Kevin Shea
- Captain Frank Callahan
- Chris Lynch
- Vincent Morello
- Chaos
- Superstructure
- Pancaked
- Richie Nogan
- Mike Kotula
- Ground Zero
- Unprecedented

- **Introduce Text**

- Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the “Walk-In-The-Shoes” question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.

- **Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions**

- As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
 - What challenges are you facing?
 - What fears or concerns might you have?
 - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?

- **Observation Questions**

- In what ways did the first responders on September 11, 2001 (9/11) demonstrate self-sacrifice to advance freedom for others?
- Several members of the 40/35 Firehouse crew responded to the need even though they were off-duty when the attack occurred. What did they understand their identity to be?
- What did the 9/11 first responders understand their purpose to be, and how did that understanding affect their actions?

- **Discussion Questions**

- Discuss the following questions with your students.
 - What is the historical context of the narrative?
 - What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
 - How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
 - How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
 - How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
 - What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
 - Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
 - How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?

- **Additional Resources**

- *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States.* New York: Norton.
- Halberstam, David. *Firehouse.* New York: Hachette Books, 2002.
- Harris, Mike. "Everyday Reminders for New York Firefighters." *Washington Times*, September 8, 2011. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/sep/8/everyday-reminders/?page=all>
- Kelley, Tina. "Kevin Shea; A Firefighter Asks Why He, Alone, Survived . . . and Why He Remembers So Little." *The New York Times*, September 11, 2002
<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/11/us/kevin-shea-firefighter-asks-why-he-alone-survived-why-he-remembers-so-little.html>

Handout A: Self-Sacrifice in a Firehouse on 9/11

Background:

In 1973, the World Trade Center (WTC) opened with its twin towers reaching over 1,300 feet in the air in the New York City skyline in the heart of the Wall Street financial district. On February 23, 1993, a large truck bomb was detonated under the WTC, killing six people and injuring more than a thousand. Radical Islamic terrorists fighting a jihad against the United States had attempted to use the dramatic event to kill tens of thousands of Americans. Over the next few years, several plotters were arrested and prosecuted.

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Narrative

At 8:00 a.m., Tuesday, September 11, 2001, (9/11) the Engine 40, Ladder 35 firehouse located on Sixty-Sixth and Amsterdam Streets in the Upper West Side of Manhattan was busy with the morning's shift change. The new shift of firefighters was already arriving, chatting with a few of the guys having their coffee on the sidewalk under the beautiful azure sky or going inside to share some breakfast. The crew from the previous twenty-four hours was wrapping up their various chores. Veterans ribbed the rookies with good-natured jabs, and friends asked about families. Topics of conversation included a golf outing to Ocean Beach, Maryland, by five of the firemen and a four-mile race run by two of the firemen to honor a fallen firefighter.

Twenty-five-year-old Michael D'Auria had not yet graduated from the academy and only been to one fire. But he was a chef and cooked excellent meals at the firehouse, and he had gladly taken over a shift for Bob Menig who had a doctor's appointment that morning. Another young firefighter, Kevin Shea, enjoyed making fresh pots of morning coffee for the others, and was lingering a bit after he was relieved from his shift. Chris Lynch, on the other hand, was a bit more eager to get home and rushed out to catch a train at Penn Station. Twenty-eight-year veteran Captain Frank Callahan was the senior officer that morning and provided a steady, demanding leadership in which everyone was expected to professionally complete their assigned tasks.

When the first plane hit the north tower of the World Trade Center at 8:46 a.m., all of the firefighters in the firehouse quickly gathered around the station television to watch the coverage and were as shocked as any Americans. Their thoughts raced as they assessed the damage. As firefighters, they knew this catastrophe would be massive. After the second plane hit the south tower at 9:03 a.m., they put on their gear and departed the firehouse

at 9:08 a.m. with emergency sirens blaring and lights flashing. Experienced fireman Vincent Morello was supposed to go off duty and demanded to join the team, but the captain refused him. Nevertheless, Morello forced his way onto the engine since it was a man short. He could not imagine letting his brother firefighters go on the call without him. Thirteen 40/35 firefighters in two rigs raced for the World Trade Center with the purpose of doing everything they could to save the lives of anyone in and around the towers. Captain Callahan had called his wife before they left and articulated the feelings of all the firemen. "It's really, really bad down there. We've just gotten the ticket [the call] and we're on our way."

As the twin towers came into view, the men of 40/35 noted the enormous gaping holes in the skyscrapers and the incredible amount of smoke and flame pouring out of the buildings from the burning jet fuel. Their ride was unusually quiet as they recognized the danger they faced. As they approached the buildings, they saw the falling debris raining down from above. They also witnessed the horror of trapped people jumping from the burning buildings and hitting the ground. Vehicles had been set on fire by falling debris.

The scene on the ground once they parked their trucks and assembled with their heavy equipment was one of complete chaos. There were problems with the command structure, communications, and conflicting reports and orders. The magnitude of the disaster was simply impossible to comprehend. Their instincts as firefighters kicked in, and they knew what to do even before Captain Callahan gave them orders. They went into the buildings and started climbing the stairs to help people leave the buildings safely, put out the fires, and save the lives of those trapped by the fires. With each man carrying several dozen pounds of gear on his backs, they immediately set off for the south tower of the complex.

More than a thousand first responders courageously helped thousands of people out of the towers and away to safety. They did not give much thought to their own safety as they went into the burning buildings; they were too busy meeting the needs of the people they met. They had chosen a life of service and dedicated themselves every day to that ideal in a very practical way. On September 11, 2001, they faced the greatest test of their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the good of others.

Suddenly, at 9:59 a.m. the melting steel in the superstructure of the south tower collapsed and set off a chain reaction as the weight of the top floors pancaked on top of lower floors. The massive skyscraper collapsed into a pile of rubble weighing millions of tons and presumably killing everyone still trapped in the building or who had been on the ground directly underneath it. Clouds of debris shot out in every direction filling the surrounding streets.

Every firefighter from 40/35 was killed in that instant except Kevin Shea, who had been videotaping the historic event for a training video. He raced to get out of the building and was blown away from the tower by the concussive force of the blast. He also may have somehow dragged himself a few hundred yards from the epicenter. A news photographer found him unconscious after stumbling over him in the darkness of the thick cloud of dust. He found a weak pulse just as a Brooklyn firefighter, Richie Nogan, came across them and bent to help. Shea was covered in bruises and had a broken neck along with other indeterminate injuries. Nogan whispered to his fellow fireman: "I am your brother, and I'll be with you until we can get you out of this." Shea unselfishly thought only of his brothers in 40/35 and repeatedly asked whether they were alive before he slipped into unconsciousness again. Meanwhile, as all of these events were unfolding, the off-duty firefighters of 40/35, including the five on the golf trip, raced to Ground Zero. They reached the site of the tragedy any way they could and joined the rescue efforts searching for survivors as soon as they arrived. One firefighter from the trip, Mike Kotula, made his way back to the firehouse around midnight and unselfishly appointed himself to man the phones with the unwelcome task of receiving calls from loved ones desperately looking for news. Kotula stayed at the phone without relief through Sunday morning with little sleep. Chris Lynch found out about the attack when he reached home. He gobbled down a sandwich and headed back to the city. At Ground Zero, Lynch finally found another 40/35 firefighter helping in the effort and asked him, "Have you seen anything of our guys?" The firefighter responded softly, "They're all dead." Lynch was shocked and thought: *Are you crazy? That just can't be. Nothing like that's ever happened before. If it's bad, maybe we lose one or two men. So it can't be, things like that don't happen. You have to be wrong.* But, it was true. In an unprecedented disaster, the 40/35 firehouse had lost twelve men who left behind wives, children, siblings, and friends. On that fateful day, the Fire Department of New York lost 343 firefighters, all of whom sacrificed themselves so that others might live.

Handout B: Journaling

Answer the following questions in your journal, as you prepare to voluntarily share some of your responses in a class discussion.

1. Based on your purpose as a citizen, give two or three examples of ways you can demonstrate self-sacrifice.
2. To what extent are you currently demonstrating self-sacrifice? What other virtues are you cultivating and improving? How can you help others demonstrate self-sacrifice?
3. How does self-sacrifice as a student help you to achieve your purpose?