

The death penalty

Discussion

Work in pairs. Discuss these questions:

Do you have the death penalty in your country?

If so, for what offences? How is it carried out?

If not, what is the severest punishment that can be given?

Did you know that on average someone is executed every three days in the USA?

Reading

Read the text below and answer these questions:

1. How did the writer feel about the death penalty before the attack?
2. How does the writer feel now?

My sister was walking home from work two years ago when two men stopped her and tried to steal her handbag. She resisted and they stabbed her in the heart. The police caught them. They were found guilty of murder and they're now in prison. That's when I changed my views on the death penalty.

Before that, it was pretty easy to be liberal and to say that I didn't believe in capital punishment. But not now. There was no doubt that the police caught my sister's killers: there were eye witnesses; there was forensic evidence. I thought those guys should die for what they did. They not only took her life, they changed the lives of her family and friends. The lives of her husband and her two little children will never ever be the same.

Some people say that if you execute a murderer you become a murderer yourself, but that's not the way I see it. If you take someone's life, you lose the right to keep your own. If you murder someone, you should be forced to experience the same horror as your victim: pain and suffering, and the anticipation of the end of your life. People think that is cruel. But my sister didn't have the luxury of saying goodbye.

Some people also think that death is the easy way out for a murderer – that life imprisonment means a lifetime of suffering in prison. I don't think so. Life imprisonment is a lifetime of hot meals, reading and television – at the taxpayer's expense. That is not a suitable punishment for a murderer. But death is.

Discussion

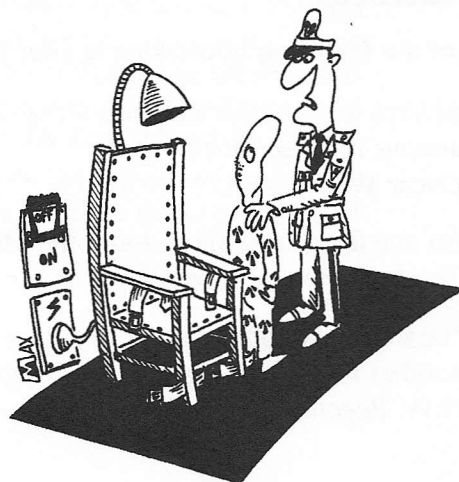
How do you feel about the writer's views:

- surprised?
- shocked?
- sympathetic?
- horrified?

If you were the writer, would you want the death penalty for the killers? Why? Why not?

List the arguments that the writer makes FOR and AGAINST the death penalty. Add other arguments of your own.

Are you basically in favour of or against capital punishment?



"Better sit down, son. I've got a bit of a shock for you."

Language 1

Do you know the nouns for these verbs? Use a dictionary if necessary.

VERB	NOUN
execute
convict
compensate
imprison
punish
abolish

Language 2

Complete the text below with the correct form of the words opposite:

Harold Spears returned home a free man yesterday. He was lucky to be alive. He had been (1) of murder in 1998 and sentenced to be (2) by lethal injection. Before the sentence could be carried out, the US state he lived in passed a new law (3) the death penalty. Mr Spears' (4) was therefore reduced to life (5) Two months later new evidence emerged. Mr Spears was found to be innocent! He was freed on appeal and will receive \$250,000 in (6)

Discussion

Work in small groups. Read these texts and discuss the questions below each one.

The Timothy McVeigh Case

More than 1000 survivors of the Oklahoma City bombing in the United States were asked if they wanted to witness the execution of Timothy McVeigh by lethal injection at Terre Haute Federal Prison, Indiana. The death chamber at the prison has only eight seats for witnesses, but over 200 of his victims and their families watched his execution by live video link.

1. Do you feel it is right that the survivors of a terrorist act should be invited to watch the convicted terrorist being executed?
2. Do you think an execution like this should be televised – then anyone who wanted to watch it would have the opportunity? Should the programme be shown around the world on satellite TV?
3. Public hanging was abolished in Britain in 1868 and the death penalty for murder was abolished in 1969. Is this evidence of a more humane and civilised society or of cowardly, left-wing liberalism?

The Saudi Situation

Amnesty International said it knew of more than 1,100 people executed in Saudi Arabia in the past 20 years, with the current average standing at two public beheadings every week. A sword is used and as many as three blows may be required to cut the head off.

1. What is your reaction to this information?
2. Do you think some methods of execution are more acceptable than others? If so, which?
3. "If someone is being executed for a particularly horrendous murder, their death should be as painful and humiliating as possible."
How do you feel about this statement?

The Case of Patrick Nicholls

Patrick Nicholls, jailed for life 23 years ago for the murder of a 74-year-old family friend, was freed yesterday by the Court of Appeal. The court acknowledged that the evidence used to convict Mr Nicholls was unreliable and that the injuries suffered by the 74-year-old were, in all probability, caused by a fall.

1. How do you think Mr Nicholls feels now?
2. How can the state compensate him for 23 years of wrongful imprisonment?
3. Have there been any cases like this in your country recently?
4. Would Mr Nicholls have been executed in your country?

Some countries give relatives of the victim a choice of what should happen to the murderer: they can agree to the murderer being executed, or they can ask for 'blood money' from the murderer as compensation for the loss of their loved one and the murderer goes to prison. What do you think about this?