

The Sea Inside

A **Hot Topic** speaking lesson by Lindsay Clandfield

Level: Intermediate +

Aims: Learners discuss issues surrounding euthanasia and look at vocabulary related to death and illness.

Time: 45 minutes

1. Write the following words on the board and ask the learners to work in pairs and put them in order to make a sentence.

think living a right not is I that obligation an

Elicit possible answers, and accept any that are grammatically correct (if you have time, you could ask learners to write these on the board). If no one comes up with the original sentence, write it under all the others.

Original sentence: *I think that living is a right, not an obligation.*

Ask learners, in the same pairs, to speculate on the origins of that sentence: What kind of person said it (a politician? a doctor? a teacher?)? What were they thinking about? What do they mean?

Ask different pairs to report back again.

2. Explain that the quote comes from a Spanish film, called *The Sea Inside* (*Mar Adentro*) (at present short-listed for an Oscar as best foreign film but might win an Oscar). Has anyone seen the film? If they have, ask them to explain it to the rest of the class but without saying the ending. If not, explain the story of the film below. (If you yourself have seen the movie, then explain it in your own words – it will be more authentic)

Mar Adentro (The Sea Inside) is based on a true story. When he was 26 years old, Spanish fisherman Ramon Sampedro misjudged the depth of water he was diving into and broke his neck. For the next 29 years, he lived the life of a quadriplegic – he was paralysed below the neck. However, he still had a voice and a mind, which he used to fight for his right to die. Many people were against him – religious leaders, conservative activists and even his own brother and sister-in-law, who took care of him for all that time.

Ramon could not kill himself on his own, he needed others to help him. But Spanish law made it illegal for anyone to do this. In the late 1990s, as Ramon's case made its way through the Spanish courts, he became a national and international celebrity. But it was after his death that the controversy exploded, especially when his "open letter" to the legal, political, and religious authorities in Spain was made public.

The film is about his relationship with two women: Julia, a lawyer who supports his cause, and Rosa, a local woman who wants to convince him that his life is worth living.

(note: the ending of the film has been deliberately withheld from this synopsis – this is important for the last part of the lesson! You can find out more about *The Sea Inside* at the following website: www.theseinside.com)

3. Dictate the following sentence stems:

Taking your own life is ...
Doctors have a responsibility to ...
Assisting someone else to commit suicide is...
If a person is terminally ill then ...
A life without dignity ...

4. Instruct learners individually to try and write two alternative endings to each sentence: one which would show the point of view of someone who supports the right to die and someone who doesn't. Circulate and help.

5. Ask learners to work in pairs. They should exchange their sentences and read the new ones, putting a tick next to sentences they agree with. Tell them to ask their partner for clarification if there is something they don't understand.

6. Distribute the text "Euthanasia – some terms" and give learners time to read it through.

7. Create the following grid on the board.

Illness/medical problem	Treatment	Dying

Ask learners to complete the grid with different words and expressions from the text. If you have dictionaries, allow them to use the dictionaries to help with any unknown words. The completed grid should look something like this.

Illness / medical problem	Treatment	Dying
<i>heart has stopped</i> <i>terminally ill</i> <i>suffering persons</i> <i>massive brain damage</i> <i>in a coma</i> <i>cannot regain consciousness</i> <i>never recover consciousness</i>	<i>life support equipment</i> <i>medical procedures</i> <i>medications</i> <i>CPR</i> <i>doses of morphine</i> <i>control pain</i> <i>procedures are performed</i> <i>injecting a patient</i> <i>prescription</i>	<i>death</i> <i>to die</i> <i>cause death</i> <i>taking the life of a person</i> <i>to kill</i> <i>committing suicide</i> <i>lethal dose</i> <i>terminate their own life</i> <i>dying</i>

8. Now tell learners to work in pairs A and B. A should cover the original text but can see the completed grid. Write on the board: *Passive Euthanasia; Active Euthanasia; Physician Assisted Suicide; Involuntary Euthanasia*. Using the grid and the board, A must try to retell as much of the text as possible to B. B should help by making suggestions and prompting A.

9. Once learners have finished, bring the class back to the topic of the film. Working in the same pairs, tell learners to ask and answer the following questions (you could write these on the board during stage 8 and have them prepared for when learners finish the language task)

If you haven't seen *The Sea Inside*:

How do you think it ends?

How would you like it to end?

If you have seen *The Sea Inside*:

How did it end?

How did you feel about that?

10. Ask pairs to compare with other pairs. If enough interest is generated (and you can see that people want to continue talking about it) open it up to a class-based discussion by asking different pairs to share their answers with the rest of the class, and eliciting reactions.

Euthanasia – some terms

The word **Euthanasia** comes from the Greek language: **eu** means "good" and **thanatos** means "death". Like so many moral/ethical/religious terms, "*euthanasia*" has many meanings. Here are some related terms.

Passive Euthanasia: Helping a person die by changing some form of support and letting nature take its course. For example:
Removing life support equipment
Stopping medical procedures, medications etc., or
Stopping food and water
Not giving CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation) and allowing a person, whose heart has stopped, to die.

Perhaps the most common form of passive euthanasia is to give a patient large doses of morphine to control pain, even though this may cause a patient's death. Administering such medication is regarded as ethical in most political jurisdictions and by most medical societies.

These procedures are performed on terminally ill, suffering persons so that natural death will occur sooner. It is also done on persons with massive brain damage who are in a coma from which they cannot possibly regain consciousness.

Active Euthanasia: This involves taking the life of a person through a direct action, in response to a request from that person. For example, injecting a patient with a substance that will kill him/her quickly.

Physician Assisted Suicide: A physician supplies information and/or the means of committing suicide (e.g. a prescription for lethal dose of sleeping pills, or a supply of carbon monoxide gas) to a person, so that they can easily terminate their own life.

Involuntary Euthanasia: This term is used by some to describe the killing of a person who has not explicitly requested help in dying. This is most often done to patients who are in a coma and will probably never recover consciousness.