Healthy organs are valuable commodities. Each year, thousands of Americans die waiting for organ transplants. In the United States, healthy organs are given to the sickest people whose bodies are still strong enough to adapt to new organs. They are not necessarily given to the people who have waited the longest.

But in 2001, Tadamasa Goto, a gang leader in Japan, came to the United States for a liver transplant at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Medical Center. His gang, a Yakuza gang called the Goto-gumi, is said to engage in theft, blackmail, assault, and even murder. Soon after he received the transplant that saved his life, Goto returned to Japan.

Later, the media reported that Goto had agreed to provide information to the FBI, allowing him to skip the wait list and receive a new liver. Many people were shocked and angry. They feel that the hospital should have denied Goto a new liver because of his criminal activities. Some people also believe organs should not go to non-Americans. American taxpayers help fund American hospitals, so they believe that these hospitals should help Americans first.

However, others think the hospital acted correctly. They believe that all patients have the same medical rights, including Goto. They do not want medical practitioners to evaluate whether patients are good or bad people. Many religions and belief systems say that each person has intrinsic value, no matter who they are or what they have done. Doctors try to honor this intrinsic value by treating all sick people, even criminals, with equal care and respect.

Additionally, people who support Goto’s transplant remind us that no one can accurately predict how a person will act in the future. While we might infer from Goto’s past behavior that he will continue his criminal activities, no one knows for sure. Similarly, some people object to giving alcoholics liver transplants, arguing that they will just ruin their new livers by going back to drinking. But maybe they won’t.

Interestingly, people born outside the United States donate about 20% of the UCLA Medical Center’s healthy organs. According to a UCLA doctor, denying transplants to foreigners could discourage these donations. Over 95% of the hospital’s healthy organs are given to Americans. What do you think? How should recipients of healthy organs be decided?

Questions for Classroom Discussion:
- Who is Tadamasa Goto?
- Why did some people object to his liver transplant?
- Why are healthy organs such valuable commodities?
- Why do you think hospitals try to honor the intrinsic value of each person?
- What consequences might there be if hospitals could refuse to treat “bad” people?
USE THE FOCUS WORDS

**intrinsic** *(adjective)* essential or natural to something

- Sample Sentence: Many religions and belief systems say that each person has intrinsic value, no matter who they are or what they have done.

- Turn and Talk: Describe someone you know who has an intrinsic ability to charm people.

**commodity** *(noun)* something that is bought and sold; a useful or valuable thing

- Sample Sentence: Healthy human organs are valuable commodities.

- Turn and Talk: Name a few commodities that your family purchases on a regular basis.

**practitioner** *(noun)* person who works in a profession

- Sample Sentence: They do not want medical practitioners to decide what care to provide based on whether patients are good or bad people.

- Turn and Talk: Besides teachers, what are some other types of education practitioners at your school?

**evaluate** *(verb)* to judge the value or worth of

- Sample Sentence: City officials evaluated the homeless shelter’s performance and decided to give it more funding.

- Turn and Talk: Should students be evaluated on their performance, effort, or both? Explain.

**infer** *(verb)* to conclude based on evidence and reasoning; to make an educated guess

- Sample Sentence: While we might infer from Goto’s past behavior that he will continue his criminal activities, no one knows for sure.

- Turn and Talk: Based on the progress of modern technology so far, is it reasonable to infer that robots will one day take over the world?
DO THE MATH

Option 1: Human organs are valuable commodities. Many people need a new heart, liver, or kidney to live. When an organ becomes available, medical practitioners must evaluate which patients would be good hosts. This process is based on the belief that each person has intrinsic value; the goal is to save as many lives as possible.

As of October 2014, there were one hundred twenty-three thousand, nine hundred twenty-one people waiting for organ transplants in the United States. Which answer shows this number written in standard form?

A. 123,912
B. 123,921,000
C. 123,921
D. 100,023,921

Option 2: Many people in the U.S. need organ transplants in order to survive, but they are kept on a wait list because organs are scarce commodities. The graph below shows the change over time in the number of people waiting for organs and the number of people who donated organs that year.

How many times as many people donated their organs in 2013 than in 1991?

\[
14,257 \div 6,953 = 2.05 \text{ times as many people}
\]

How many times as many people were on the wait list in 2013 than in 1991?

\[
121,272 \div 23,198 = 5.23 \text{ times as many people}
\]

Discussion Question: Since there are not enough organs to go around, some people get new organs while others die waiting for them. Medical practitioners evaluate which patients have the greatest need and best chance of survival. They try to save as many lives as they can. However, in developing countries like Bangladesh, Haiti, and Ethiopia, commodities like clean water and medicine can be just as scarce—and just as important—as a heart or kidney. People of all the world’s major religions believe that all people have intrinsic worth. Some people infer from this that we have a responsibility to help people when we can. A heart can save someone’s life, but so can $5 for antibiotics. Is deciding who gets organs similar to deciding how to distribute money to organizations that help poor people survive, like Oxfam or the Red Cross? Or is it different? Why?

THINK SCIENTIFICALLY

Students in Mr. Seemy’s class were reading about the human excretory system. They learned that kidneys filter waste products out of the blood. The waste is combined with water and expelled from the body as urine. People whose kidneys fail must either have trained medical practitioners filter their blood with expensive “dialysis machines” or else get a kidney transplanted from someone else’s body. “My uncle has diabetes,” said Manvi, “and one of his kidneys is beginning to fail. Everyone in my mother’s family is evaluating whether they can donate a kidney to my uncle. His daughter, my cousin Pritti, may donate a kidney for the transplant—I think her kidney will be a good match because they’re so closely related.”

Mr. Seemy said, “That’s a good thought, Manvi. Kidneys aren’t commodities that can be made in a factory and sold at some sort of human parts store. They’re not all alike. The donor and recipient must have the same blood type and similar kidney tissue. You’re right to infer that daughters and fathers, like your cousin and uncle, are more likely than unrelated people to have a matching blood type and similar tissues.”

“Pritti has thought seriously about the decision and created a chart of all the pluses and minuses,” said Manvi. “I’ll check with Pritti to see if she’d be okay with me showing it to the class.”

Later, Manvi presented the chart that Pritti created to help her decide about donating her kidney to her father.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits and Rewards of Donating a Kidney</th>
<th>Possible Problems and Costs of Donating a Kidney</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With a kidney transplant, my dad will probably live 3 to 15 years longer. During those years he won’t need to use a dialysis machine every day.</td>
<td>Surgery is intrinsically risky. During the surgery, I will receive general anesthesia so I’ll be “knocked out” and won’t feel pain. There is always a very small chance that the anesthesia drugs could kill me. (But the chance is so small that it doesn’t worry me.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People are born with two kidneys, but they only need one, so I’ll be as healthy as ever.</td>
<td>If my one remaining kidney is damaged, I won’t have a backup, so I’ll need a dialysis machine or a transplant myself!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After recovering from surgery, I can continue to work, play volleyball, and dance, just like I do now.</td>
<td>I won’t be able to play any contact sports. I used to play lacrosse, but I don’t anymore. So this is only a small issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I won’t have to pay for the surgery. My father’s health insurance will pay for that. Thank goodness we have insurance!</td>
<td>It will take me about five days to recover from the surgery. The company I work for may not pay for those sick days. If they don’t, I will lose about $1,000 in pay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mayo Clinic reports that after five years, kidneys from living donors have a 90% success rate. My father and I both have type A+ blood and four matching tissue antigens, so there is a very good chance that my kidney won’t be rejected by my father’s immune system.</td>
<td>A six-antigen tissue match is considered perfect, and we don’t have that. Even if we did, we could go through the whole transplant process and my father’s body could still reject my kidney. It would be terribly disappointing to go through so much and then have it all fail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love my father! There’s intrinsic value in helping the people we love.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you think creating a list of “pros and cons” is a helpful way to evaluate the factors of an important decision like donating a kidney? Explain. Answers will vary.

What other items would you add to the “benefits” column? What would you add to the “costs” column? Answers will vary.

What items in Pritti’s lists would you value most? For example, you might emphasize not being able to play a contact sport if you enjoyed playing football.
DEBATE THE ISSUE

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A
- Decisions about who receives organ transplants should only be based on medical factors.

OR

B
- Decisions about who receives organ transplants should only be based on medical and lifestyle factors.

OR

C
- American residency should also be considered in decisions about who receives organ transplants.

OR

CREATE YOUR OWN

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

Can you show me evidence in the text that...

You make a good point, but have you considered...

I believe that...

I agree with you, but...

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:
TAKE A STAND

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

intrinsic | commodity | practitioner | evaluate | infer