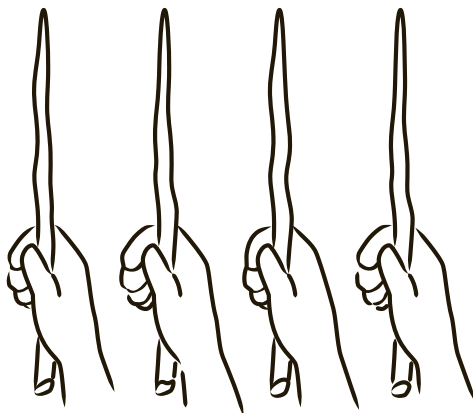


Read the folktale about an unusual way people could find out who is telling the truth. Then answer the questions that follow.

THE STICK OF TRUTH

by Sam McBratney



- 1 IN THE CENTRAL square of a great city, there stood the statue of a famous general. This bronze soldier was mounted on a horse with two silver stirrups. Early one morning, a boy climbed up and stole the left stirrup, an act that offended and enraged the public. However, the crime was seen by a street cleaner and some others, and before long four boys had been brought before the governor.
- 2 Now, the governor had no idea which boy was the guilty one, for the thief didn't own up. So he sent for a well-known judge, admitting that he was not sure what to do. "I cannot let them go, for one is the thief. Yet I am unwilling to punish them all, for three of them are innocent. What would you advise in this situation?"
- 3 It was a dilemma the judge understood well: should one punish them all, including the innocent? Or free them all, including the guilty? Experience had taught him a way to proceed. It sometimes worked. He turned to his assistant and said, "Bring me my red bag, the one with the stick of truth in it. I don't think we have a great problem here."
- 4 When the bag arrived, the judge drew out four sticks, all sharpened at one end, and each exactly the same length as the others. The judge

gave one stick to each boy, telling him to bring it back the following morning. “One of you is the thief who stole the stirrup,” he said, “and the thief has the stick of truth. It will show him up.”

5 The governor was puzzled. “But how does this work?” he asked.

6 The judge addressed the boys in front of him. “One of you four has the stick of truth. When you bring back the sticks in the morning, the stick of truth will be just a little longer than the others—about a thumbnail longer. That’s how we’ll know the thief.” The judge waved a hand at the boys. “So off you go until the morning.”

7 When the morning came, they assembled once more, and in the midst of a great silence, the boys presented their sticks to the judge. Holding up the sticks, he measured them against one another and found that one was shorter than its fellows by about a thumbnail.

8 “This boy here, who presented the shorter stick, is the guilty one,” said the judge.

9 “But you said it would be longer,” the governor pointed out.

10 “So I did. And our thief decided to whittle away a bit of his stick, just in case. Now that his own conscience has betrayed him, I trust he will lead us to the missing stirrup.”

11 Then the boy confessed, fetched the stirrup from its hiding place down a drain, and agreed on his punishment: that he should keep the statue of the general clean of dust and pigeon droppings for the rest of that year.

