

Charlie Brown's Dilemma

By Rudy Owens



What should Charlie Brown do? This simple concept in Charles Schulz's Peanuts comic strip at first appears deceptively plain. Each fall, Lucy always lures Charlie Brown with a story, to get him to come and kick the football she holds under her finger. Reluctant, but still wanting to believe in her goodness and to just kick the pigskin, he ultimately puts aside his mistrust. He charges and lands on his back in agony, Lucy having duped him again and pulled the ball away before he connects. Lucy always has a story, an excuse, and zero remorse. They return next fall, and the next, always with the same outcome, but a new twist by Lucy, continued doubts by Charlie Brown, and the reader confronted with the question of what I call "Charlie Brown's dilemma" (see my [poem](#) of the same name).

This situation, not surprisingly, has proven to have decades-long staying power because it forces the reader to ask some raw, uncomfortable, but entirely relevant questions about how we deal with ourselves, our values, our fears, other people (good and bad), and the world. In short, it asks us to ask ourselves, how do you want to show up. Today. Tomorrow. Every day. Especially with other people. These are intensely deep issues because they are some of the most relevant choices we make, pretty much all of the time.

So Charlie Brown's conundrum can mean whatever the reader believes it means to him or her. Ask someone, who do you think about this

situation? What do you think Charlie Brown should do, or why does Lucy do what she does? I've heard wildly different versions of what this scenario means from everyone I have spoken to. I asked an office colleague what she thought. She said, I think he's a hopeless romantic. I replied, but is he a fool? She said, no, just a hopeless romantic, and he will kick the ball one day. I asked another person I know, who suggested Charlie Brown enjoys "it," and life, and is better for it. I personally think that are 100 ways or more to look at this.

As I look at some of these variations of this scene by Schulz, I see things I have been thinking about and acting out my entire life. And these are choices I face now, and will address tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow, and so on. So, yeah, this little strip is very much burned into my brain.

So in the end, there it is: the blue sky in the distance, with the smell of fall in the air. I see a girl with black hair balancing a football with her fingertip. I know who she is, what she is, and all that she has said. I know she has failed me before, and before, and even before that. Her promise is alluring. There is that ball to kick, and doing so would bring almost divine satisfaction -- an elusive dream fulfilled. I begin to run. My pace quickens. She is still as stone, smiling. I can almost feel the foot on the ball in my mind. Closer. Yes, I am finally going to send that ball flying ...