

Understanding Causes of Global Conflict: Peer Interviews
High School – Contemporary World History; American Civics/Government

Elaborated Lesson Focus:

The purpose of this lesson is for students to consider their own personal opinions about the situations and behaviors that cause conflict in society. Students learn to communicate their experiences by developing a common vocabulary, interviewing in pairs, and sharing their feelings and opinions about local, national, and international conflicts and the different societal elements that contribute to them.

Performance Tasks:

Students will establish a common set of vocabulary terms with which they can discuss conflict

- Students will brainstorm examples to support these vocabulary terms
- Students will share what they know about significant, ongoing global conflicts
- Students will interview someone, and be interviewed, about their personal opinions regarding conflict and some of the societal elements that cause conflict
- Students will analyze their own and another student's responses in a large group discussion

Techniques and Skills:

Vocabulary building, large group discussion, interviewing, critical and analytical thinking, research skills, responsive and creative writing, expository writing, supporting ideas with examples, and working in pairs.

Requirements:

Materials:

- Chalkboard and chalk, or chart paper and markers
- *Student Handout: Interviewing Peers*

Time:

- 45 minutes

Lesson Preparation:

- Prepare copies of *Student Handouts* for distribution

Procedures:

1. Write the following terms on the chalkboard or on chart paper:
 - Peer pressure
 - Bias
 - Oppression
 - Ethnocentricity
 - Greed
 - Miscommunication
 - Fear
 - Need
2. Ask for volunteers to read each of the terms aloud. Brainstorm definitions and examples for each term, recording student responses as “word webs” on the chalkboard or on chart paper. These word webs should remain visible for reference throughout the following activity.
3. Ask the class what all these terms have in common. Explain that these concepts are often the cause of conflict—both on a personal level, such as a conflict between friends, as well as on a larger level, such as a civil war or even genocide.

4. Ask the class for examples of a conflict, and have them relate that conflict to one of the terms on the board. Elicit examples of conflict that exist personally (between friends, family members), locally (gang rivalries, school rivalries, local ethnic conflicts), and globally (the Vietnam War, Khmer Rouge, Darfur, war in Iraq, etc.).
5. Explain that during the next activity, they will be discussing personal opinions and feelings that relate to these topics, and that it is important to respect each other's responses and perspectives.

Note: It may be helpful to establish ground rules for discussion before this activity, to ensure productive and respectful dialogue. See *Activity: Setting Ground Rules for Conversations in Class*.

6. Divide the class into pairs. Give each student a copy of *Student Handout: Interviewing Peers*.
7. Allow 10 minutes for one student to interview his or her partner using the questions on Page 1 of the handout. Students should take notes on their partners' responses in the space provided.
8. After 10 minutes, instruct students to "switch." The interviewer will become the interviewee, and vice versa. Allow 10 minutes for students to complete Page 2 of the handout.
9. After every student has had the opportunity to be both interviewer and interviewee, reconvene as a whole group to discuss the activity. Encourage students to share with the class some of the answers they gave in pairs. Use some or all of the following questions to guide the discussion:
 - How have your personal experiences with censorship affected you? When have you felt censored?
 - How do you feel when your freedom of expression is limited? Why is your freedom of speech important to you?
 - How has the spirit of cooperation or collaboration affected your neighborhood or school?
 - When have you seen a lack of cooperation result in hostile behavior?
 - Who is the most generous person you know? How do they affect the people around them?
 - How has insecurity negatively affected you, or the people around you? How do you think the feeling of insecurity might be linked with anger?
 - Why is respect important? What does respect mean to you?
 - Why are some people indifferent to the suffering of others? What impact does their behavior have on their environment, and the people around them – both those who are suffering, as well as those who are not suffering?
 - How does bias bring about hostility and conflict? How might tolerance bring about peaceful conflict resolution?
 - What did you learn about your partner during this activity?
 - Did anything you shared surprise you and if so what was it and why?
 - Did anything you and your partner had in common surprise you and if so what was it and why?
 - Did you learn anything about yourself in this activity and if so what was it?

10. For homework, students should freewrite in response to the following prompt in their journals or class notebooks:

“Everyone has inside of him a piece of good news.”

—Anne Frank

Extension Activities and Ideas for Further Learning

- Create a class edition of a “tolerance” newspaper, based on the information students shared in their pair work. Assign students different columns: an in-depth profile of someone who represents generosity; an overview of a conflict and suggestions for resolution; a featured interview with a local “peacemaker;” an editorial about “need” in the community and suggestions for solving the problem; cover and report about a school event that epitomizes diversity; etc. Format the edition like a real paper. Copy onto newsprint. Distribute copies of the newspaper in the school lobby to promote conflict resolution in the school community.
- Assign students a research project on a local or global conflict with the following assignment:

Choose one specific local or global conflict. Describe the conflict objectively and research the conflict’s current state, as well as its history. Then provide a solution (or solutions) to the conflict. Incorporate existing solutions and organizations who are working on solving the conflict (such as the U.S. Supreme Court, the United Nations, etc.) as well as suggesting new approaches in your solution. Conclude your research project with an additional resource page that lists at least 5 nonprofit or nongovernmental organizations that work to solve the specific conflict, or one of the issues underlying the specific conflict. The resource page should be formatted similar to a bibliography page, with each entry including the name of the non-profit or NGO, its address, phone number, and website, as well as the organization’s mission and at least two of its programmatic or policy efforts.

- Assign students a narrative expository essay using the following prompt:

Every one of us has had a personal experience with peer pressure, bias, oppression, ethnocentricity, greed, miscommunication, fear, or need. Describe a personal experience that you’ve had with one of these issues. Explain how the experience relates to the issue and how it affected you. Then identify a domestic or global conflict that also relates to the same issue. Explain how the conflict relates to that specific issue, and then compare and contrast your experience with the larger conflict. How are the causes of each similar and different? How are their effects similar and different?

Student Handout: Interviewing Peers, Page 1

Directions: Complete this handout in pairs. Choose one person to interview the other and complete Page 1. Then switch roles and complete Page 2. Record your partner's responses in the space provided.

Questions for First Interviewee:

1. Tell about a time when a feeling of insecurity or self-consciousness caused you to act in an aggressive or insensitive way towards someone else. What did you do?

2. Tell about a time, in your own experience, when you witnessed someone acting with indifference to the suffering or discomfort of others. How did you react?

3. Name someone you know, or know of, who represents the antithesis of greed: generosity. What impact has this person had on you?

4. Give an example of a policy, law, or rule that you think perpetuates bias. Why do you think this is a biased policy? How does this policy make you feel?

Questions for Second Interviewee

1. Tell about a time when you treated someone else with disrespect, and explain what caused you to act that way. How did this behavior make you feel?

2. Tell about a time when you had a personal experience with censorship, or, in contrast, when your freedom of speech was upheld in the face of resistance. How did you feel when you thought your right to express yourself might be curtailed?

3. Tell about a time when you have, or someone you know has, been in need. How do you think this experience impacts a person? A family? A community?

4. Give an example from your school, neighborhood, or from a current event when lack of cooperation and/or rivalry lead to a conflict. How did this affect you? Explain.
