

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICTS



AGENDA

- Starter
- So What?
- Conflict Webs
- They're Everywhere
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

Objectives

Students will understand that recognizing and appreciating differences among themselves is a form of respect called “tolerance.”

Students will explore positive and negative aspects of conflict.

Students will define “conflict.”

Students will identify conflicts and the people involved.

Materials Needed

- A dictionary (Part II)
- News articles or letters to the editor, one for each group of four or five students. (Clip or print brief news articles focusing on different types of conflict; for example, include articles on a war, a debate in your city council, a protest, or issues involving your local community.) (Part III)

Starter (3 minutes)

Begin by telling students the story of the Lilliputian rebellion in Chapter 4 of *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift. Explain that one day, the emperor of Lilliput decided that all people should break their eggs open on the smaller end instead of on the larger end when cooking. Many people in Lilliput hated this. These "BigEndians," as the book calls them, started six rebellions over how they broke open their eggs. These rebellions forced one emperor to lose his crown, forced another to lose his life, and killed 11,000 people.

Ask students if they would get into an argument with someone over which end of an egg they break open when cooking. Lead students to recognize that this really is not an issue to fight over. Point out that there are many different types of conflict, some with sources very difficult to imagine and understand. Some of these causes, however, are not worth fighting over.

Part I So What? (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students understand that recognizing and appreciating differences among themselves is a form of respect called "tolerance."

1. Students observe visible differences among themselves.

Divide the class into groups of five or six students. Have members of each group seat themselves in a circle. Say, "Every person in this classroom is unique in some way. There are differences that are obvious and differences that are not so apparent." Tell students that they are going to perform an experiment to see if what you said is true.

Ask for the tallest person in each group to raise their hand. Indicate that these students will begin a chain reaction within their groups by observing the person to their right and reporting one detail that is visibly different between them.

Model the activity before having students begin. Point to a student and say, for example, "My hair is long and yours is short."

Remind students to respect each other and not put anyone down. Have students begin. Circulate through the room as groups work, making sure that they are not focusing on personal or sensitive traits. Make suggestions if needed.

2. Students become aware of invisible differences.

When students have finished, tell them to now turn to the person on their left and share a possible difference that cannot be seen. Model this by pointing to a student and saying, for example, "I live in a yellow apartment building; do you?" or "I have two sisters; do you?"

3. Students define "tolerance."

When students have finished, begin a discussion about this activity by asking:

- Is it true that every person in this classroom is unique?
- Is it true that some differences are obvious and some are not? Give examples.
- What would this class be like if everyone were exactly the same?

Remind students that since each one of us is a unique individual, it makes sense that we look different, think differently, believe differently, have different likes and different strengths, and so on. Point out that these differences make us who we are and that the world would be a very boring place if we were all exactly the same.

Write the word “tolerance” on the board, and ask students to explain what it means. Help students to understand that “tolerance” means “respect for differences among people.” Say, “Tolerance allows us to appreciate one another, learn from each other, and work together.”

Part II Conflict Webs (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students explore positive and negative aspects of conflict.

1. Students create word webs.

Write the word “conflict” on the board and circle it. Ask students to raise their hands if they have ever been in a conflict. Point out that it seems that everyone (or almost everyone) has. Explain that this makes sense, as conflict is a natural part of life.

Invite students to suggest words or phrases that come to mind when they think about conflicts. Write each suggestion on the board, connecting it to the circle with a line in order to form a word web. (Students’ responses will most likely reflect negative words, such as “anger,” “quarrel,” “fighting,” “yelling,” “hitting,” and so on. Encourage students to also include positive words, such as “difference of opinion,” “debate,” “compromise,” “problem solving,” etc.)

2. Students draw conclusions from their webs.

Ask students to point out which words and phrases in the web might indicate tolerance. Have students discuss how tolerance impacts conflict. Discuss the idea that tolerance doesn’t necessarily mean agreeing with another person’s views, but does mean respecting their right to those views.

Ask students, “Does conflict always produce negative results?” Through discussion, guide students to realize that conflict is a natural part of life and that it does not always have to produce negative results. Point out that when conflict is handled in a constructive manner, it can produce positive results. Conflict has the potential to bring about much needed change. Explain that students will be exploring ways to handle conflicts constructively in this module.

3. Students define “conflict.”

Challenge students to develop a definition of the word “conflict” that makes sense to them. If students have difficulty verbalizing a definition, ask them to refer to the word web, use the word in a sentence, or consult a dictionary.

Write words, phrases, and examples on the board. Then, guide students to formulate a definition that reflects the idea that conflict is the struggle between two or more opposing forces or ideas. Point out that this definition reflects neither positive nor negative results—just the fact that conflicts involve disagreements or clashes.

Part III They’re Everywhere (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students identify conflicts and the people involved.

1. Students read an article about a conflict.

Divide the class into groups of four or five students, and give each group an article that you have clipped or printed from a news publication or magazine. Explain that each group should have a reader who will read the article aloud to the group and a recorder who will take notes about the group’s discussion.

Explain to students that they are to read their articles, discuss them, and identify what the conflicts are and the people involved in them. Tell students that they do not need to resolve the conflicts—they are simply to tell what the conflicts are about and identify the parties involved.

2. Students report their findings.

When students have finished, invite the recorders from each group to identify the conflict their group discussed and the people involved. After each recorder has responded, invite the other students to answer the following questions:

- Did you feel that you had enough information to identify the conflict and the people involved? Explain your answer.
- Did your article describe positive or negative behaviors? Give examples to support your answer.
- Do you think this conflict had or could have positive or negative results? Explain.

Point out that it is often difficult to answer these questions, since the issues in a conflict are not always clearly presented. Explain that when this happens, it is up to us to get the information we need before we pass judgment or get involved.

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students if the people in the articles they discussed showed tolerance toward others. Encourage them to support their opinions with reasons. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Tolerance is important because it shows respect for the differences among people.
- Conflict is a natural part of life.
- Conflict does not have to be negative; it can produce positive results.

Student Assessment

1. Define “tolerance.”
2. Define “conflict.”
3. List five possible positive results of conflict.
4. List three examples of conflict you have seen recently, either in the movies or on TV. Who was involved? What was the conflict about?

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Using Quotations

“Some people have foreign accents—until they laugh.”

Have students discuss the meaning of this quote and draw their own cartoons depicting similar realizations about the common ground that exists among all people.

Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

Divide students into small groups. Provide each group with a large piece of butcher paper. Have each student draw pictures showing positive and negative conflicts on a portion of their group’s paper.

Display the papers around the room. Have students circulate through the room and view each group’s paper. Discuss what makes a conflict positive or negative.

Writing in Your Journal

Have students make lists of things they like and things they don’t like about their best friends.

Discuss why we tolerate weaknesses in people we care about. What can students learn from accepting and tolerating their best friends?

Using Technology

Play “War” by Edwin Starr and other protest songs for students. Explain that songwriters often write songs protesting war.

Ask, “Is war ever necessary?” Discuss this question with students. Identify the positive and negative consequences of recent wars or conflicts.

Homework

This week, have students note situations in which they hear people speaking rudely to each other (e.g., in stores, while waiting in line). Have them include the time of day, the place, the people involved, and what the conflict seemed to be about. Tell them that they should not get involved in the conflicts.

Have students present their findings to the class. Ask, “Did you find people to be mostly polite or mostly rude?”

Additional Resources

Show students a photo of *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso. Explain to students that this enormous work was painted in protest of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship in Spain. Picasso directed that it be returned to Spain when the country became a democracy, which happened after Franco died.

Discuss the painting with students. Have them make a list of adjectives that describe how the painting makes them feel.