

### **Lesson-3: Active Listening**

#### **How to prepare:**

Provide print or digital newspapers and discuss the meaning of controversy. Make sure students have a working definition of controversy. Use Lesson 1, the “defining” lesson, “What is a controversy?” if students need to review the term.

Explain that discussions require students to listen thoughtfully to each other, even when/ if they disagree.

#### **What to do:**

Have students locate news photos and stories in print and digital editions that show individuals, groups or governments dealing with controversy. Ask them which ones show people listening to each other and trying to establish and follow rules that will help them reach solutions to problems. Ask students to give reasons or provide evidence that explains why they chose specific photos and stories as demonstrating listening and following rules to solve problems.

In stories, ask students to identify barriers that keep people, organizations and/or government officials or institutions from solving problems and/or resolving conflicts.

**Title-4:** What are the best reasons or evidence?

**How to prepare:**

Provide print or digital newspapers and identify or have students help you identify a controversial subject to study. Review the meaning of “controversy.”

Establish ground rules for conducting discussions: Everyone should have a chance to speak. Explain that strong opinions are supported by text or evidence that can be verified. Discuss the goal of the lesson, not to reach agreement but rather to inform students and have them listen thoughtfully to each other, even when/ if they disagree.

**What to do:**

Using print editions and archived stories, have students collect news and information. They should also search other reliable sources for information related to the controversy.

Ask students to outline all sides of an issue, presented in credible sources. Use reading and collaborative conversations to make sure they grasp the facts. During discussions (or seminars), they should use facts to support any opinions they voice. They should cite sources in news stories and elsewhere and not rely on hearsay and/or emotional appeal.

Have students list ten reasons why something related to the controversy should or should not be done. In small groups, have them improve the list and create broad categories. They should vote on the best reasons and vote again for the side they choose.

Or have the whole class or small groups select the three best reasons for each side. Students should vote before and after discussion, and determine whether the conversations affect their positions.

Ask students to write about the difficulty they have suspending judgment they and other students collect news and information.

**Follow-Up:** Review what you know and learn from reading about how to judge the credibility of a source. Discuss your conclusions and post checklist on a classroom chart for reference. Add to this source:  
<http://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/six-critical-questions-can-use-evaluate-media-content/>

## **Title-5: Mediator, Arbiter, Judge and Jury**

### **How to prepare:**

Provide print or digital newspapers and have students collect news and information from the newspapers and other sources on controversial subjects.

If this is a first attempt at having students discuss controversial subjects, you may choose an issue that can be discussed with a single story, a comic strip or a series of stories that can be collected over a short period of time. As students become more independent, they may choose a more complicated issue that is reported over several weeks, or each small group may choose to study a different controversy and conduct research to gather information about it on their own.

### **What to do:**

Organize students into assigned roles. Different persons should assume the roles of mediator, arbiter and judge. You may also choose a group (jury) to review news and information presented in support of the positions.

Other students should take opposing positions and choose someone to speak for their side. Have the spokesperson for each side debate the facts gathered and collected from newspapers and/or other sources before the judge and/or jury. Have the judge and/or jury decide which side prevails. After the debate, students should change sides and go through the process again.

Or have two students debate before the class after having worked together to gather facts. The class should say whether the students provided enough news and information and which side seemed stronger. Discuss the difficulty any student has when/if he/she presents the side of a controversy that he/she does not support. Talk about the fairness of having someone argue a side that he/she opposes.

After hearing all sides, have the mediator or arbiter propose a solution, which is often a compromise. Have the class vote. Does the vote support any proposed compromise?

**Title-6:** Where do you stand?

**How to prepare:**

Provide access to print and/or digital editions of newspapers and ask students to collect opinions about a controversy. They should look for reasons given for holding any opinion.

**What to do:**

After reading and discussing the factual information gathered on a controversy, students should look closely at the varying viewpoints. Have them list all of the opinion statements that they find in quotes, editorials, cartoons, columns and letters to the editor. Take the list and give each opinion to a student. Have students line up with the students holding the most extreme views on each end. Others should line up according to their positions between the extremes.

Present or have students present each statement related to the controversy. Have the student support and/or defend with facts the position he or she has been given. After this student finishes, others with similar or opposing views should contribute on request. Students may change position at any time during the discussion. If helpful, offer an open-ended sentence, such as the one below:

This is where I stand because...

If concerned that students learn to listen to their classmates, have them write down but not sign paragraphs that summarize what they've heard or summarize orally what others have said.

After considering news and information and discussing opinions expressed by various sources, have students write their opinion, using editorials, letters to the editor, columns and editorial columns as models.

**Title-7: Mediation Case Study**

What is the conflict?

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1. Facts:
  - a. What happened or what are the key facts that have led to the dispute?
  - b. Who are the people involved? What positions do they hold?
  - c. Why is the problem or conflict coming up now?
2. Issues:
  - a. What issues are at the heart of the dispute?
  - b. What does each side of the dispute want? How do you know?
3. Brainstorm solutions to the problem or ways to resolve the conflict.
4. Discuss the pros and cons of potential solutions or ways to resolve the conflict.
5. Merge, eliminate, and/or pare down potential solutions or ways to resolve the conflict. Determine whether each is short- and/ or long-term.
6. Determine the two most workable solutions or ways to resolve the conflict.

**EXTRA:** Vote by secret ballot to determine which of the workable solutions or ways of resolving the conflict received more support in your classroom.

*The outline above was adapted from "Teaching Responsibility" developed in 1997 by then NC Dept. of Public Instruction consultant, Doug Robertson.*