

Lesson One



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What Is Conflict?



“Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional.”

~Max Lucade

Lesson 1: What Is Conflict?

- Goal:** To define the term “conflict,” introduce students to the different dimensions of conflict, and analyze the causes and costs of armed conflict
- Objectives:**
- Students will explore the definition of the term “conflict” (activity 1)
 - Students will gain a baseline knowledge of the subject of peace and conflict resolution (activity 1 and 2)
 - Students will examine the different dimensions of conflict and how they can be applied to any conflict situation (activity 2)
- Essential Question:** What is conflict?
- Materials:** Poster board, newspaper, markers, and computers with internet access
Handout 1: World Conflict Fact Sheet
Handout 2: Five Dimensions of Conflict
- Resources:** Nobelprize.org’s online interactive conflict map allows students to explore conflict and wars in the 20th century. Where did these wars take place? Have some regions experienced more wars than others? Who were the main protagonists in these conflicts? The conflict map gives students the opportunity to answer these questions. It displays wars with at least 1,000 military battle deaths. The conflict map is available online at http://nobelprize.org/educational_games/peace/conflictmap/.
- Time Frame:** 2 class periods
- Age Level:** High school - adult
- Vocabulary:** Conflict, diffuse, global conflict, internal conflict, interpersonal conflict, intragroup conflict, intergroup conflict, international conflict, transboundary conflict

Teacher Background: As Max Lucade stated, “conflict is inevitable.” It is often the result of contrasting ideas, perceptions, and interests over similar needs or limited resources. It is interdisciplinary, covering diverse issues: environmental concerns, human security, scientific debates, family ties, and political ideologies. Whether as individuals, or when acting in groups, interpersonal, intergroup, and international relationships influence how humans manage and cope with conflict; but individuals act differently depending on the context of their relationships. This lesson is designed to provide students with a greater awareness of: 1) the context of conflict in the world and in their own lives, and 2) how societies and individuals can move beyond conflict to build more peaceful societies.

Activity 1: Defining Peace and Conflict

(Approx. 2-3 class periods)

Procedure:

1. **Journal.** Prior to beginning this lesson, have students write in their journals about their understanding of conflict using the following questions:

Questions for Journal

- What is peace?
- What is conflict?
- How does conflict begin?
- How does it manifest itself?
- Where and when does conflict occur?
- What are some of the factors that lead to conflict?

2. **Brainstorm.** Write the words “conflict” and “peace” separately on two pieces of posterboard. Have students approach the board and write down what words come to mind if they were to define these terms. Once all the words have been recorded, review the definitions. If possible, keep these definitions up throughout the unit. At the end of each new lesson, allow two minutes for students to add anything they think they might have missed before. As the teacher, add words or phrases throughout each activity as you see fit to push students’ thinking and challenge their understanding of these terms.
3. **Small Group Work.** Present the class with Handout 1: World Conflict Fact Sheet. If you have the internet available, have students explore the “Conflict Map” on the Nobel Prize website. The map can be found at http://nobelprize.org/educational_games/peace/conflictmap/. Break students into small groups and have them discuss the facts about conflict and the map. Have the students jot down their main discussion points for a larger class discussion and any burning questions their group came up with. Assign one student from each group to record what their group talks about and another student to report back to the class. Students can use the following questions to help guide their discussion:

Questions for Discussion

- What jumps out at you the most on the conflict map?
- Which “conflict fact” did you find the most surprising and why?
- What are some sources of conflict?
- Why do conflicts occur?
- Looking back on our brainstorming session, would you say the words we used to define conflict were generally positive or negative?

4. **Discuss.** Have each group share the most important points from their small group discussions as well as their questions.

Source: Adapted from “Lesson One: Introduction to Peace and Conflict,” *African Leadership Academy Peace Curriculum*. (2007). Posted 2007, http://ldt.stanford.edu/~vuchic/ALA_PeaceCurric_Lessons.doc.





Activity 2: Dimensions of Conflict

(Approx. 2-3 class periods)

Procedure:

- 1. Brainstorm.** Write the following quote by Yoda on the blackboard: *“Fear is the path to the dark side...Fear leads to anger...anger leads to hate...hate leads to suffering.”* - Yoda, Star Wars, Phantom Menace. Brainstorm with the class what this statement means.
- 2. Small Group Work.** Split students up evenly into five groups and give each student Handout 2: Five Dimensions of Conflict. Assign each group one of the “dimensions of conflict” and ask each group to read and discuss its “dimension.” Allow enough time to make sure everyone understands the concepts and vocabulary in their dimension. Ask each group to prepare a short role play (2-3 minutes long) that demonstrates the concepts in their dimension. The role play should apply the information introduced in the dimension to a conflict situation. Each dimension is complex, so students might want to choose just a portion of it to demonstrate.
- 3. Perform Role Play.** Have each group perform its role play for the entire class. Following each presentation, have the class critique it. Allow students to ask the presenters questions to clarify how one might recognize the dimension of conflict their presentation focused on.
- 4. Research.** Ask each group to go through newspapers and cut out 5 stories of controversial issues and conflicts that are occurring locally, nationally, or internationally. Challenge the students to think broadly about the term conflict, for example: how could a controversial issue like hunger be considered a conflict? Ask them to choose one of the stories they found and define as best as they can the dimensions of that conflict. Have each group turn in a report answering the following questions regarding the conflict they chose:

Research Questions

- Who is involved in the conflict?
- What are the sources of the conflict? What is it about?
- What type of relationship exists between conflicting parties?
- What is the history of the conflict?
- How are the parties dealing with the conflict?
- What impact, if any, does this conflict have on your life?

- 5. Discuss.** As a large group, ask students to discuss their research using the following questions:

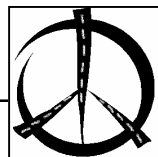
Questions for Discussion

- What kind of decisions do people need to make about controversial issues?
- What are the different ways parties try to deal with their issues or resolve conflicts?
- Does one method seem more effective than another?
- Do some conflicts or issues seem more complex than others?
- Consider the following quote by Max Lucade: *“Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional.”* Discuss with students what they think this statement means.

Source: Adapted from “Five Dimensions of Conflict” by Gayle Mertz and Carol Miller Lieber, *Educators for Social Responsibility*, (2004). <http://www.esrnational.org/>

WORLD CONFLICT FACT SHEET

- The 20th century was the most violent century in all of human history: an estimated 203 million people were killed in state and non-state wars during this century.
(Twentieth Century Atlas - Death Tolls, <http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/warstat8.htm>)
- Modern war victims are 90% civilian and half of those killed are children.
(UN Human Development Report 2002, pg. 16)
- 80% of the world's 20 poorest countries have suffered from a major conflict in the past 15 years.
(The Role of The World Bank in Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction, <http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/essd/essd.nsf/CPR/Concept2>)
- Global estimated military spending in 2006 was \$1204 billion, 120 times the cost of providing basic education for all, estimated at \$10 billion a year.
(Global Issues - World Military Spending, <http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/ArmsTrade/Spending.asp>)
(Millennium Campaign, <http://www.millenniumcampaign.org/site/pp.asp?c=grKVL2NLE&b=185519>)
- 90 countries still have active landmines and other explosive weapons that pose a risk of detonation, with 15,000 - 20,000 mine victims per year.
(United Nations Human Development Report 2002, pg. 11)
- Between 8,000 and 10,000 children are killed or maimed by landmines every year.
(UNICEF, <http://www.unicef.org/media/9482.html>)
- “In the last decade, more than 2 million children died as a result of armed conflicts. They were often deliberately targeted and murdered. More than three times that number were permanently disabled or seriously injured.”
(UNICEF, http://www.unicef.org/graca/a51-306_en.pdf)
- “It is estimated that some 300,000 children - boys and girls under the age of 18 - are today involved in more than 30 conflicts worldwide. Children are used as combatants, messengers, porters and cooks and for forced sexual services.”
(UNICEF, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_15421.html)



FIVE DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT

The five dimensions of conflict below chart a typical conflict, whether it is interpersonal or global.

DIMENSION # 1: Who or how many parties are involved?

- Internal – a conflict within oneself
- Interpersonal - a conflict between two or more individuals
- Intragroup – a conflict within a group (Groups can be institutions, organizations, or any groups of people who share a specific role or identity.)
- Intergroup – a conflict between two or more groups
- International – a conflict between two or more nations
- Global – a conflict that directly or indirectly has an effect on all people and nations in the world
- Transboundary – a conflict between groups that is based on their positions in relation to a geographical boundary

DIMENSION # 2: What are the sources of conflict? What is it about?

- Conflicts over Resources (Human Resources; Things and Capital; Natural Resources; Land and Territory)
 - When people, groups, or nations are competing for the same resources
 - When there is a dispute over who has a right to certain resources
 - When people, groups, or nations want to take someone else's resources or prevent someone from getting needed resources
- Conflicts over Values (Beliefs, Choices and Perspectives, and Preferences)
 - When people, groups or nations have relations with each other, but hold different deeply held beliefs about the role of an individual, group or family within their culture, cultural practices, politics, and/or religion
 - Conflicts over "what is most important"
- Conflicts over Psychological Needs (Power and Control, Emotional Needs)
 - Conflicts related to an individual's or group's need for respect, love, affirmation, approval, friendship, and power over their own fates
 - Conflicts related to the need of individuals to belong and have the opportunity to develop and achieve
 - Conflicts that arise when psychological needs are not fulfilled
 - Conflicts between an individual and other people or institutions when obstacles prevent someone from having their needs met



FIVE DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT

DIMENSION #3:

What type of relationships exist between conflicting parties?

The type of relationship that exists between conflicting parties will often determine the intensity of the conflict and its outcome. Important questions to ask include:

- What kind of climate is present between conflicting parties? How can the climate change the outcome?
 - Trusting or suspicious
 - Friendly or hostile
 - Open or resistant
 - Calm or emotionally tense
- Do parties come to the conflict with equal power or a power imbalance? Does any one party control the resources and decision-making process?
- What is the degree of interdependence between the conflicting parties? (In other words, do the actions of one person or group seriously impact the others involved in the conflict?)
 - How often do the parties see or interact with one another?
 - Is a positive relationship valued equally by both parties?
 - Does each party need the cooperation of the other to achieve important goals?
- How well do the parties know one another?
 - Does the relationship matter to both or one of them? How much?
 - Does it matter if conflicting parties come from different cultures and know little about the other?

DIMENSION #4:

What is the history of the conflict?

Usually the longer a conflict exists, the more intense and complex it becomes, and therefore, the more difficult to resolve. Yet, there is also a point when parties can become so “battle weary” that they finally see resolution as the best strategy.

Factors that complicate a conflict:

- The duration of the conflict
 - How long has the conflict continued?
 - Are the original parties still actively involved in the conflict?
- The frequency of the conflict
 - How often has the conflict reemerged?
 - Are there periods when the conflict escalated to severe levels?
 - Did the conflict develop in stages?



Source: “Five Dimensions of Conflict” by Gayle Mertz and Carol Miller Lieber, *Educators for Social Responsibility*, (2004).

FIVE DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT

- The intensity of the conflict.
 - How life threatening is the conflict?
 - Is the conflict emotionally or ideologically charged?
- The perception of the conflict by both those directly involved and those who witness it but do not feel directly affected by it
 - Do people “see” the conflict as serious or irrelevant? (Conflicts can remain unresolved when there is little or no pressure to address them – when people from “inside” or “outside” the conflict don’t perceive it to be compelling enough to resolve. Conflicts are not always visible or easily identifiable. In these situations, the conflict remains, even though it is hidden from view or ignored.)

DIMENSION # 5: How are the parties dealing with the conflict?

In every conflict, all parties involved make choices to take some action they think will help them get what they want and need. These choices may be spontaneous or calculated, constructive or destructive. Conflicts can develop in stages and consequently may involve many different responses as the conflict proceeds. Some of those choices are:

- Avoidance – deny, ignore, or back off the conflict
- Diffuse the conflict – postpone, wait, gather data, or check it out
- Engage in the conflict – methods might include:
 - Direct force or competition
 - Accommodation – to adapt or adjust
 - Compromise
 - Use collaborative problem-solving
- Practice restorative justice - valuing community continuity and well-being in the solution

