

Defining Conflict, Revisited

How does my understanding of conflict change over time? How can studying past conflicts help me understand current conflicts? How do these studies help me understand peacebuilding?

This two-part activity is designed to provide a “bookend” experience for students in any social studies course: The first part introduces students to definitions of conflict and peace at the beginning of the course, and the second part asks students at the end of the course to revisit and solidify their understandings based on specific historical evidence. This activity is therefore a helpful way for students to review key events and historical details or themes they have studied.

Standards Connections:

Responsible and Involved Citizenship
Historical Content Knowledge: Accuracy
Historical Content Knowledge: Synthesis
Evidence and Analysis

Grade Level:

High School

Time:

Part 1: One class period at the beginning of the course/ semester

Part 2: One class period at the end of the course/ semester

Materials:

- Activity: Defining Conflict lesson 1.1 in the Peacebuilding Toolkit for Educators, OR, the modified version below.
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Large Post-it Notes
- A large white-board/ chalk-board or a wall that students can stick post-it notes to (for Part 2 of the activity at the end of your course).

Part 1: Developing critical questions about conflict and peace at the beginning of a course

Procedures

(90 minutes)

- ❖ Divide students into groups of 3-5, and give each group a large piece of chart paper, enough markers for each student.

- ❖ Explain that the purposes of today activity are to: 1) Create working definitions of conflict and peace, and 2) To identify ways in which people contribute to each.
- ❖ Have the groups fold the chart paper in half. Open the paper, and on one side of the crease, they will write 'conflict', and on the other, 'peace', and then fold it again so that only the 'conflict' side is showing (in other words: when the activity is done, they will open the paper and be able to see 'conflict' and 'peace' side-by-side).
- ❖ Place the folded paper so that the side labeled 'conflict' is face up.
- ❖ Explain that you will be asking a series of questions, and after each question, groups will write down their responses on the paper: Any words, phrases, symbols, quotes, names, events, etc. that come to mind.
- ❖ Questions:
 - *What* is conflict?
 - *Who* creates conflict? Where does it come from?
 - What *emotions* are involved in conflict?
 - How do I (or any other *individual*) contribute to conflict?
- ❖ Have each of the group's report out, and create a concept web on the board of their responses. As the group's report out, try to group, categorize or link their responses.
- ❖ Instruct each group to create a working definition of Conflict, and write it on their paper.

- ❖ Now, instruct the groups to flip their paper over to the side that says 'peace', and repeat the process:
- ❖ Questions:
 - *What* is peace?
 - *Who* creates peace? Where does it come from?
 - What *emotions* are involved in peace?
 - How do I (or any other *individual*) contribute to peace?
- ❖ Instruct each group to create a working definition of Peace, and write it on their paper.
- ❖ Have the group's report out or share their definitions of Conflict and Peace, and conduct a discussion: Observations? How do conflict and peace relate? Are there positive and negative benefits to each? Etc.
- ❖ Final step: have groups turn their entire paper over to the back, blank side.
- ❖ On this side, instruct each group to write a list of questions generated by this activity. For example, they may ask such questions as: "Is there more peace or more conflict in the world?" or "What famous conflicts have been resolved peaceably?" "Who is responsible for peace?"
- ❖ Collect their chart papers. Later, type up their questions and give all students copies, or post them in the room. You will return to these questions at the end of the course in the next phase of this activity,, but they may also be useful to drive discussions, activities, or projects throughout the semester.

Part 2: Revisiting Conflict and Peace at the end of a course

Note: *This activity can be used after studying historical events, social movements, or really any Social Studies content. I recommend that it be used in conjunction with part 1, since students will find it meaningful to return to questions they generated at the beginning of the*

course, but this activity can certainly be used as a stand-alone way to review any course content.

Procedures

(90 mins)

- ❖ For this activity, students will need: 10 LARGE post-it notes each, and access to all of their notes, binders, handouts, resources, etc. from throughout the course. Additionally, they will need access to the questions they created in Part 1 of the activity at the beginning of this course.
- ❖ Explain that students will be doing an activity that will help them 1) look back and review key content of the course, 2) analyze and seek out the patterns in the course content, and 3) see if the class is able to answer any of their questions from the beginning of the course.
 - Note: For this first step, you will need to individualize the instruction based on your students and your course content. For example, if you cover a lot of chronology, you may want to divide up students to focus on certain eras. Or, you may instruct individual students to find one detail from each era. You may have students work in pairs, or alone.
- ❖ Instruction: “Take 15 minutes to look back over your relevant course materials, and find SIX to TEN important details from our work this year/ semester. How you define “important” is up to you. The key thing is that you have a variety of types of details”:
 - Event (for example: *the invention of the Printing Press, ca 1450, Columbus’ “discovery” of Hispaniola*)
 - Issue/ dilemma/ problem (for example: *the black plague, States’ Rights vs Federal Gov’t in the 1850s*)
 - Historical Figure (for example: *Machiavelli, political philosopher, 15th century*)
 - Social Movement (for example: *The Enlightenment, the Abolitionist movement, Women’s Suffrage, the Harlem Renaissance...*)
 - Key quote (for example: *“In some ways, when you enslave a person, you enslave yourself” Historian Margaret Washington.*)
 - Source of conflict (for example: *Slavery, the Crusades, Antisemitism...*)
 - Source of peace or unification (*Gandhi’s Satyagraha campaign, the end of Apartheid*)
- ❖ On individual post-it notes, have students write each of their “details” and stick them to the white board/ chalk board. Each post-it should include the ‘title’ of the event, key dates, and a couple of other clarifying notes if needed. Instruct students to write **large and bold** so that other students can read their notes.
- ❖ After they are all on the board, briefly discuss and ask students WHY they chose the particular events or details. What made them seem “important”? What impacts did these events, people or movements have? If possible, do this while gathered around the board, so that students may point to or read their notes.
- ❖ Now, above the post-its, on one side of the board, write “Peace”. On the other end, write “Conflict”. Here’s the tricky/ fun part. Instruct students to MOVE notes to a place that

“makes sense” to them. You may have to facilitate the group movement so that everyone gets multiple chances to move notes, and so students don’t block others’ view.

- ❖ Depending on your course, students may arrange the notes in various ways: perhaps on a continuum, or perhaps in thematic groups, and possibly with sub-groups under the main Conflict/ Peace headings. The important thing is that the teacher allows the students to discover the groupings themselves, until all post-its are accounted for.
- ❖ Now, see what they have come up with: Ask the students to help you label or define their groups; how have they “organized” the key details of their course work? Use a marker to annotate or label the different groupings. *Some possible sub-groupings that may emerge: sources of conflict; sources of peace; wars; oppression; acts of rebellion; oppressive leaders; values and philosophies; ways of fighting; relationships; obstacles...etc.*
- ❖ Briefly discuss with the students why they arranged the notes as they did, or any other general observations about how they connected or categorized their notes on the board.

Now that the class has collected and organized the data, for the final part of this activity, you may seek different outcomes, depending on the goals of your particular course.

- ❖ Divide students into pairs, and give each of pair one of the questions that was generated at the beginning of the course. Can they answer the question based on the accumulated evidence on the notes on the board?

or

- ❖ Conduct a Socratic Discussion, where students use evidence from the board to discuss the questions from the beginning of the course.

or

- ❖ Allow students to choose one of the questions from the beginning of the course, and write an essay in response.

or

- ❖ Allow students to choose a question that intrigues them, and instruct them to write a thesis statement based on the evidence on the board. This thesis may then serve as the foundation for a research project, or a presentation.