

Discussions about moral issues and practicing perspective taking

Suitable Grade levels: 9th-12th

Time: 60-120 min

Prerequisites: Students should be familiar with the moral intuitions, their causes, and how to notice them in language. E.g.

- [Noticing moral intuitions](#)
- [Moral taste buds](#)
- [Causes of our moral intuitions](#)

Materials:

- [Handouts and worksheets](#)
- [Moral vocabulary list](#)

Related content:

- [Two stories about capitalism](#)
- [True stories of people who left radical movements](#)
- [Exploring values](#)

Lesson Overview

In this activity, students practice the constructive exchange of opinions on a topic by reflecting on the possible origins of opinions and the role of moral intuitions. The goal of this activity is not primarily to convince others of one's own opinion, to "win" or to be right, as is often the case in debates and pro-contra discussions. Rather, it is a dialogue with the goals of listening mindfully and intently, understanding the backgrounds and underlying values of different opinions, and recognizing the role of (automatic) emotions and intuitions in yourself and others. This may result in a more open attitude towards opposing attitudes and new arguments and towards finding common ground. The activity can therefore also be seen as a supplement to usual debates and discussions in the classroom.

Learning goals

Competencies: self-regulation competency, intellectual humility, critical thinking, cooperation competency (perspective taking), intercultural competence, evaluation competency, growth mindset

Learning objectives and skills:

Students will be able to

- ask questions about the backgrounds of their own opinions and the opinions of others;
- identify the role of personal experiences and encounters in the formation of their own opinion and the opinion of others about an ethical issue;
- identify the role of emotions and moral intuitions in their own opinion and the opinion of others about an ethical issue;
- take the perspectives of and empathize with others.

Essential Questions

- What factors contribute to *my opinion* about a topic or issue? What role do moral intuitions, emotions, experiences in my past, influences from my social environment, things that I have read, seen or heard, play?
- What factors contribute to *another person's opinion* about a topic or issue? What role could moral intuitions, emotions, experiences in the individual past, influences from the social environment, things that the person has read, seen or heard, play?
- How can we best exchange opinions with others so that we can learn more about the topic from each other and find a solution?

Suggested lesson plan

The activity consists of 4 phases.

- **Phase 1: Understand opinions on a specific topic.** Where does the opinion come from? Which personal experiences have influenced it?
- **Phase 2: Identify the moral intuitions of opinions.** Which values and moral intuitions are underlying the opinion? What does the person care about, what is important to her? Provide students with the moral vocabulary list.
- **Phase 3: Reformulation.** Reformulate opposing opinions so that they reflect the same moral intuitions
- **Phase 4: Reflection.** What have we learned about ourselves and the topic?

The activity can be carried out in different ways:

- as a group discussion (e.g. in small groups of 2-4 students) in the classroom
- individually as a written essay
- Subsections as a discussion in the classroom and other sections as an essay

The [handouts](#) apply to the implementation as group discussion and can be adapted if necessary.

A variety of discussion topics from the curriculum of different subjects are possible. The following links list possible topics for discussion:

- [Procon.org](#) - Debate topics and pro / contra arguments

If possible, the class should be presented with a list of topics from which to select or generate a list of topics together. The entire class can also discuss the same topic, or each small group can pick a topic from the list that they want to discuss, or each individual student can pick a topic from a list to which he / she wants to write an essay.

References

Open Mind (2018). Workshop Facilitator Guide.

https://openmindplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/OpenMind_Facilitator-Guide_12-12-18.pdf

<http://www.civilpolitics.org/content/when-we-teach-rhetoric-we-teach-values-a-writing-curriculum-to-teach-civil-discourse/>

How to Discuss Controversial Issues in Class: Reflective Structured Dialogue Lesson Plan Idea.

<https://www.procon.org/view.background-resource.php?resourceID=007020>

Hanel, P. H. P., Roy, D., Taylor, S., Franjeh, M., Heffer, C., Tanesini, A., & Maio, G. R. (2023). Using self-affirmation to increase intellectual humility in debate. Royal Society Open Science, 10(2), 220958. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.220958>

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If you would like to use this material in your classroom, we would be happy if you contact us. For more information and teaching materials, visit our websites:

<http://www.GlobalESD.org>

<http://openevo.eva.mpg.de>



This material was developed in collaboration with the department of Comparative Cultural

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Comparative
Cultural Psychology

<https://www.eva.mpg.de/comparative-cultural-psychology/education.html>

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