

A Guide to Helping Students Build Understanding

The goal of this guide is to teach students how to empathize and understand the wide array of perspectives. The guide is meant to be used for all sorts of topics, however, evolving and adapting the guide based off your individual situation is encouraged.

The guide is meant to be used by students who are passionate about getting a group of students to become more aware of the points of views surrounding certain issues. Additionally, we suggest educators, of primarily middle and high schoolers, to use the model to show that issues and stories are multidimensional.

Possible Topics of Discussion:

- Gun rights
- Immigration
- Economy and the environment
- Death penalty
- State rights v. federal power
- Reproductive rights
- Etc.

Below is a step-by-step explanation of how to construct a class:

1. Introduce Topic

Start off by introducing the topic or issue through the medium of an article or video. Then, discuss the material with your group. Prompt them by asking questions that showcase their own opinion. Questions could be as simple as: What do you think of the perspectives being shared here? Let this section be substantive, but not too long.

2. Small Groups

Next, you will introduce the activity. You will split up into an appropriate number of groups, no more than four to five in a group. For each group you will assign them a perspective. Thus, if you have 12 students and want to talk about gun rights, you'd have 3 groups, and assign them a different perspective of a person (political figure, spokesperson, advocate) or organization (government or non-government). Along with each perspective, you will provide several articles and/or videos to build foundational understanding within the groups. Allow the groups to break off and work together, but prior to sending them off, be sure to tell them to go beyond the foundational material, and seek out material on the internet or in books. During their activity, move about from group to group, checking in on their progress. During your stops at each group remind them that they are supposed to be able to represent the perspective that they are researching.

3. Venn Diagram

Your next step is to bring the group together for a Venn diagram activity. On a board or large piece of paper, construct a Venn diagram featuring a circle per perspective. So, if you had three perspectives, have a Venn diagram with three labelled (organization's title or person's name) circles. Then have each group share out the perspective they've researched, and correspondingly begin to fill out the circles of the Venn diagram. Once each group has shared out their findings, open the discussion up, and have the class, as a whole, look for commonalities between the perspectives. A prompting questions to find a common point:

If (Perspective A) were to have a conversation with (Perspective B), what's a point that they could use to catalyze a productive discussion?

The productivity of the Venn diagram is based on your ability to know the perspectives beforehand. By knowing the material prior to discussion, it will allow you to help the group find commonalities and stark differences amongst the perspectives. All this being said, if there are no commonalities between the perspectives, that's okay! The goal of this, remember, is to show students that these perspectives exist, and we should try our best to understand other philosophies.

4. Conclusion

First off, don't politicize the ending. Our goal is not to get people to think one way or another, but rather to acknowledge that opinions on these topics vary, and that understanding these perspectives is what's important.

Make your concluding remarks are summary-based. Synthesize the points made on the board, or in discussion. Go through each perspective highlighting the key points each group made, and showcase the similarities that exist, if possible. It always helps to compile a list of key takeaways on the board, so students know what they should keep in mind. Be sure, at the end, to thank the group for their participation, and encourage them to continue their work in the topic.

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