



Lesson 18.11 “Perspectives in a Democracy”

Unit 18: Civics and Government Today

Lesson Objectives

- Students will practice an active listening technique in discussion.
- Students will identify the difference between debates and discussions and what situations may call for each.
- Students will engage with mediation and civil discourse through scenarios and role plays.
- Students will respond in writing about why differences of opinion make a democracy stronger.

Lesson Competencies

- I can use grade-appropriate grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary to clarify a message appropriate to the purpose and audience when speaking. (ELA 7)
- I can strategically use precise language (including academic and domain-specific vocabulary, shades of meaning), syntax, and discourse appropriate to my purpose and audience. (ELA 8)
- I can identify, explain, and analyze the core civic practices and foundational principles that guide governments and communities. (Moose SS)
- I can state an opinion that answers a question about a topic or text. (ELA 6)

Essential Questions

How has New Hampshire been shaped by many voices?
How have New Hampshire’s people shaped its government?

Focus Questions

How do people act as good citizens in a democracy?
What are the people’s rights and responsibilities?

Estimated Time

Three or four 40-minute class sessions

Materials & Equipment

“Feeling Words” for projection, if desired
“Debate” and “Discuss” words and definitions for projection
“Goals / Situations” matching for projection
Class set of “Civil Discourse” handout
Class set of “Mediation” handout
“Summary of Scenarios” for educator reference
Scenario assignments as appropriate for students
Class set of “Benefits of Difference” handout
Access to Unit 18, Learn It! “[Good Citizenship](#)”



Educator Introduction & Rationale

Americans have many different viewpoints on many different issues. This wide variety of opinions is one of the things that makes America strong because it means people have many ideas about how to govern the country and how to solve problems. A society where people express different opinions will often be more creative and innovative than one in which everyone believes exactly the same thing. Some ideas will work better than others, but by sharing and discussing ideas, the American people should be able to make good decisions about how they want to be governed in a way that benefits us all.

In order to find common ground, Americans must be civil to one another. It is only by practicing civility that we will be able to evaluate ideas to find the best ones. Rudeness curtails sharing ideas and discourages participation in the democratic process. However, working out compromises and building consensus are skills that take years, often a lifetime, to develop. Not only are these skills essential for good citizens, but they are also necessary to begin to practice as early as possible.

This lesson is the eleventh in Unit 18: Civics and Government Today. Although it is not strictly necessary for students to have completed any previous lessons in the unit, if students understand democracy, local government, and the rights and responsibilities of good citizens, their learning in this lesson will be more thorough. Specifically, lessons 18.1 "What Is Democracy?" 18.5 "Local Government," 18.7 "Rights and Responsibilities," and 18.9 "Good Citizenship and Civic Engagement" would be helpful.

In this lesson, students start with an active listening practice that divides up the facts and feelings of a story. They then reflect on the difference between "debate" and "discuss" and consider goals of different kinds of conversations. Educators are provided with handouts describing civil discourse, mediation, and scenarios and given suggestions for ways in which they may be used. The lesson finishes with a reflection on the benefits of differences.

There is a reinforcement activity inviting students to interview an adult about a time they faced conflict or disagreement. Three extension activities have students write dialogue imagining a conflict and demonstrating civil discourse or mediation, suggest visiting a town meeting, and recommend further experience with peer mediation. Please adapt all the material in this lesson, as necessary, to meet the needs of the students in your classroom. Please note, lesson vocabulary and definitions are at the end of the document. You may wish to preview these with your students.

Learning Activity

Activation

Facts and feelings. Tell students they are going to practice a special kind of active listening to get ready for role playing difficult discussions. Divide students into groups of three and tell them each person will get a chance to practice each role. The three roles are:

1. Storyteller
2. Fact Listener
3. Feelings Listener

Each round, the Storyteller will tell the story of a conflict they experienced. This could be a fight with a friend or sibling, a situation in which they were frustrated, or a remembered conflict that happened to someone else. They will have 1 minute to tell the story. During that time, the Listeners will listen for different aspects of the story. At the end of the story, the Fact Listener will retell **ONLY** the facts of the story. Then, the Feelings Listener will retell **ONLY** the feelings of the story.

If desired, project the “Feelings Words” list and demonstrate what a round might look like. Reassure students that dividing a story up into facts and feelings is a hard skill that might take practice. It is, however, an important skill that can help them have dialogues in hard situations and resolve conflicts. Circulate to support learning and let students practice for three rounds.

Discussion

Discussing disagreement. Tell students that one of the most important skills for living in a community is the ability to discuss differences of opinion and belief. Ask students:

- How do you talk about disagreements?
- If you and someone else disagree and have to live in a community together, how do you discuss your conflict?
- What are some personal conflicts you’ve experienced that you had to talk about? (No names please.)

Talk together about situations students have faced and their experiences. At an appropriate time, project the two words “discuss” and “debate.” Ask students what the difference between these two words is. How are the goals of the two words different? Write ideas on the board and work together to define the words and their goals. Use the provided definitions if desired.

When people live in a community together and disagree about something, it is important to know what the goal of their interaction is. Project the “Goals and Situations” matching activity and discuss together. Which two of the situations and goals are they most likely to find in their community? Which two require people to listen to each other? Of course, debating to convince another of your side isn’t inappropriate, but be clear with students that debating is not the way to participate most effectively in a community. Listening and working together is essential.

Student Reading

Civic virtue. Before beginning Direct Instruction, have students read Unit 18, Learn It! "[Good Citizenship](#)," pages 6 and 7 to reinforce the concept of civic virtue and why it is essential for a healthy democracy.

Direct Instruction

Mediation and civil discourse. There are two ways people can work together when they disagree, depending upon the goal of the situation. In the real world, these practices are usually intertwined, but in the classroom, practicing them separately gives students an opportunity to work on select skills.

- **Mediation** is a practice where people who disagree talk with a third person who guides them through listening to each other, discussing options for a solution and choosing a plan that works for both.
- **Civil discourse** is a practice where people who disagree use active listening skills to be open and respectful while discussing their perspective and hearing other people's perspectives.

Decide for your class when you will introduce and practice these skills. It is recommended you do not introduce them both in the same learning period as they are similar but not the same. Over successive classes, teach one and then the other, using the provided scenarios and suggestions below. Explanation sheets for students on both mediation and civil discourse are provided in the resources file.

Guided Practice

Learning through role plays. Carrying out the activities in this lesson plan will vary from classroom to classroom, depending upon what lessons in the unit your students have completed and the maturity of the group. Options are listed below for using the provided scenarios.

- When using scenarios, give students time to think of more details for their characters so they have ideas of what to say for dialogue and reactions.
- Use the scenarios and practice mediation techniques with one student playing the mediator and two students (or more) role playing sides of the conflict. Having the educator play the mediator as an example first helps students understand the role.
- Have students use the scenarios and role play them in two ways: one without civil discourse guidelines and one using civil discourse guidelines. Take care that students don't take role playing rude citizens too far!
- Within a role play or mediation, pause for a minute and ask each person to take the other's point of view. Can they put them selves in another's shoes on the spot?
- Have a whole-class discussion or small group discussion about scenarios from an outside perspective. What is each person thinking? What solutions might work for this situation? Which are win-win and which are win-lose?



- Discuss these questions for a scenario:
 - What rights exist as part of this scenario for each person?
 - What responsibilities are part of this scenario for each person?
 - How would an ideal citizen act in this scenario?
 - How would a selfish or bad citizen act in this scenario?
 - What could the community do to support each person in this scenario?
- Have students brainstorm additional scenarios, perhaps including school citizenship scenarios.

Reflection

Benefits of disagreement. A variety of opinions and viewpoints is a crucial aspect to our democracy and strengthens it. Acknowledge with students that disagreement and discussing difficult topics is hard. Pivot the issue and distribute the “Benefits of Difference” handout. Give students time to think individually, respond, and discuss as a class. Although disagreement can be difficult, what are the benefits?

Reinforcement

1. **Interview an adult.** Invite students to bring the materials from the lesson home or to a trusted adult and look at them together. Have the student interview the adult about a time they faced disagreement and what happened.
2. **Jefferson’s position.** Thomas Jefferson lived in a time when our forefathers were building the United States—and struggling through many disagreements about how to do it! Give students “Jefferson’s Position” and invite them to respond.

Extension

1. **Write a skit.** Write a skit about one of the scenarios or imagine a different scenario. Use mediation or civil discourse in the skit to help the characters work through their conflict.
2. **Town meeting.** Visit a town meeting to see civil discourse in action. Consider how adults who disagree communicate with each other.
3. **Peer mediation.** There are many peer mediation programs around the country and the world. Upper elementary grades are not too young to begin to practice these skills and to start a program. Have interested students research to see if a training program is available in the area and talk to the administration to see if it would be supported in the school.



Supporting Materials

- Inspiration for the "Feeling Words" handout Kylie Rymanowicz, *Expanding your young child's emotional vocabulary*.
www.canr.msu.edu/news/expanding_your_young_childs_emotional_vocabulary
- Inspiration for "Mediation" handout:
 - Elizabeth Cary, *Kids Can Cooperate: A Practical Guide to Teaching Problem Solving* (1984).
 - *D.C. Public Schools Mediation Training Manual*.
- Inspiration for "Civil Discourse" handout:
 - Megan Zwart, *Tools for Difficult Conversations*.
www.saintmarys.edu/news/civil-discourse
 - *Institute for Civil Discourse and Democracy* poster "Ground Rules for Public Discussion" www.k-state.edu/icdd/images/ICDD%20Ground%20Rules%20poster.pdf
- Additional Resources for Civil Discourse:
 - *Facing History and Ourselves* has a complete handout with several lesson plans and independent information and activities. Highly recommended; free account necessary. www.facinghistory.org/books-borrowing/fostering-civil-discourse-how-do-we-talk-about-issues-matter
 - The University of Arizona's *National Institute for Civil Discourse*. Founding Board Chairs Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush. Extensive resources for the public. nicd.arizona.edu/#nicd-board
 - *Institute for Civil Discourse and Democracy*. From Kansas State University, a higher education institute for civility in public life. Includes a poster appropriate for the classroom and additional workshops and materials. www.k-state.edu/icdd/about/Civic%20Discourse%20def.html
- There are a wide variety of mediation and peer mediation resources available, but particularly well-laid out and free is *Online Peer Mediation: Taking Peer Mediation to the Next Level*. www.peermediationonline.org/index.html. *Peer Mediator Training Manual for Elementary School Students* by Cheryl Cutrona and other is old but thorough and gaged for elementary students. Found at eric.ed.gov/?id=ED410352

Standards

“Moose on the Loose” Content:

- ✓ Students will understand that New Hampshire today is a modern, diverse state with a rich culture and thriving economy. (3-5.T8.1)

“Moose on the Loose” Skills:

- ✓ Communicating and Critiquing Conclusions (3-5.S2.1)
- ✓ Understanding and Participating in Government (3-5.S6.1, 3-5.S6.2)

New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ Civics and Governments: The Nature and Purpose of Government (SS:CV:4:1.1, SS:CV:4:1.2)
- ✓ Civics and Governments: Rights and Responsibilities (SS:CV:4:4.1)
- ✓ Economics: Financial Institutions and the Government (SS:EC:4:4.2)
- ✓ US / NH History: Political Foundations and Development (SS:HI:4:1.2)
- ✓ US / NH History: Social/Cultural (SS:HI:4:5.4)

NCSS Themes:

- ✓ Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- ✓ Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance
- ✓ Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

C3 Frameworks:

- ✓ Civic and Political Institutions (D2.Civ.2.3-5, D2.Civ.3.3-5, D2.Civ.4.3-5, D2.Civ.6.3-5)
- ✓ Participation and Deliberation (D2.Civ.7.3-5, D2.Civ.8.3-5, D2.Civ.9.3-5, D2.Civ.10.3-5)
- ✓ Processes, Rules, and Laws (D2.Civ.11.3-5)
- ✓ Economic Decision Making (D2.Eco.1.3-5, D2.Eco.2.3-5)
- ✓ Taking Informed Action (D4.6.3-5, D4.7.3-5)

Common Core ELA:

- ✓ Craft and Structure in Informational Text (RI.4.4)
- ✓ Comprehension and Collaboration in Speaking and Listening (SL.4.1, SL.4.1a, SL.4.1b, SL.4.1c, SL.4.1d, SL.4.3)
- ✓ Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (SL.4.4, SL.4.6)
- ✓ Vocabulary Acquisition and Use (L.4.6)

Lesson Vocabulary

citizen	(noun) A member by law of a nation or group
citizenship	(noun) The position of belonging to a nation or group by law
civic disposition	(noun) Having the traits necessary to take on the responsibilities of citizenship in a community
civic engagement	(noun) Actions taken to participate in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a community
civic virtue	(noun) Actions citizens do and qualities citizens have that benefit their community
civility	(noun) Behaving or speaking in a polite manner
community	(noun) A group of people living together or having something particular in common
committee	(noun) A group of people who make decisions and plans about a specific topic or issue
common good	(noun) A phrase in the preamble of the Constitution; what is best for the community
compromise	(verb) The process of coming to a solution that works for everyone
consensus	(noun) When a group of people come to agreement about an issue
democracy	(noun) A government ruled by majority vote of the people
democratic process	(noun) When citizens participate in governing their community
discrimination	(noun) Unjustly treating someone or something differently
equality	(noun) When people or things are treated the same
foundational principle	(noun) An idea on which something stands; one foundational principle of the United States is the rule of law
good citizenship	(noun) Actions people take to appropriately behave as a member of a community, such as civic duty
government	(noun) A group of people that have the power to make and carry out laws for a community
individual rights	(noun) Freedoms a person has under a democratic government; for example, to speak freely or pursue happiness
infringe	(verb) To actively break a law or agreement



law	(noun) A rule that regulates the actions of members of a community
majority	(noun) More than half of a group
minority	(noun) Less than half of a group
neutral	(adjective) Describing something or someone who is not on any side of an issue
perspective	(noun) The point of view expressed through writing, speech, photographs, and other sources of information
responsibility	(noun) An action an individual takes to be accountable for something
rights	(noun) Something a person should legally or morally be able to do or get to have
society	(noun) What comes when people live together in a community
town meeting	(noun) A formal gathering of the citizens of a town to discuss and vote on town business
warrant	(noun) A document giving authority to do something
warrant article	(noun) A planned action or discussion item to be considered at a town meeting

