



Classroom Activity

Have Students Interview Someone They Disagree With

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As Elizabeth Emery [pointed out](#), “diversity of thought and appreciation of diverse perspectives can be difficult to develop in high school classrooms for a variety of reasons,” such as overprotective parents, overly cautious administrators, and students’ increasing desire to avoid topics that might “trigger” them. But students will undoubtedly encounter perspectives different from their own in college, the workforce, and society-at-large. Therefore, incorporating classroom activities that allow students to broaden their perspectives is crucial.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this activity is to promote viewpoint diversity, while simultaneously showing students they can be exposed to disagreement and difference without suffering. By completing the activity, students will:

- Understand new perspectives
- Improve their listening and writing skills

Summary

To help students broaden their perspective and practice constructive disagreement, have students:

1. Choose a sensitive topic with weighty consequences,
2. Find someone who disagrees soundly with the student’s opinion, and
3. Have a conversation with that person wherein the student mostly asks questions, listens, and takes notes.

After completing the conversation, students then write up a summary of the conversation that answers questions such as how the conversation made them feel and whether they changed their minds on the topic.

Guidelines

Give students the following guidelines to work on this activity (statements in **bold** are for the teacher to provide the students; statements not in bold are guidance for the teacher, which can be shared with the students):

1. Choose a topic you feel strongly about – one with substantial social or political implications. They should not choose subjects like whether pineapple belongs on pizza or which Dungeons and Dragons character is the best. Have students run their topics by you before they move forward to ensure they don’t choose highly personal or inconsequential topics. For more information on choosing topics, see the companion “How to Choose a Topic” handout.

2. Pick a person whose views are different from your own. Ideally, this is a person with whom students are familiar enough to have a potentially difficult conversation with, but not so familiar that the conversation can be silly and devoid of real content. Best friends are discouraged. Parents, grandparents, coaches, and teachers are welcome.

3. Write a list of questions you would like to know about the opposing perspective – make some of the questions required. Required questions include things like, “What evidence have you based your belief on?” “Why do you think my perspective is incorrect?”, and “What personal experiences have you had that have led you to your beliefs?”

4. Take notes during the conversation, including notes about how you felt listening to your interviewee speak, and whether you were tempted to argue. Critically, students are not to interject their own opinion – they must either ask questions or listen. Students will use the direction of the conversation to guide unscripted questions during the conversation to further understand their interviewee’s perspective.

Give your students the sheet, “How to Choose a Topic and a Person You Disagree With,” to guide them in how to choose their topic and interviewee.

Reflection and Assessment

After the conversation is over, have students write a 500-word summary of the conversation, addressing the following questions:

1. Did this person’s perspective make sense?
2. How did I feel as I listened to the opposite perspective?
3. Does their perspective seem less radical or ridiculous than it did before the conversation happened?
4. Have I changed my mind in any way?

Students can share what they wrote during whole-class or small-group discussions.

Activity Extension

Before this activity: To foster relationships within the classroom that set the stage for open inquiry and constructive disagreement, implement the activity “Creating Connection,” which can be found [here](#).

Follow-up activity: To build upon students’ ability to engage in constructive disagreement, implement the activity “Seeking Disconfirmation,” which can be found [here](#).

Source

This guide was adapted from a Heterodox Academy blog post with the same name, written by Elizabeth Emery. Click [here](#) to access the article.