

Lesson Plan for George Mitchell Witness Video

Rationale: Testimonials provide first-hand accounts of experiences, which can help clarify complex concepts. George Mitchell’s account of his role as a mediator in Northern Ireland illustrates both the qualities of an effective mediator and the challenges of mediation in international contexts. But listening to the story of a mediator alone does not make one a good mediator. Students must also practice the skills of mediation. After students watching the video, they participate in a role play in which they practice key skills—active listening, cooperation, trust/relationship building, and identifying positions and interests—in a simple mediation scenario. For more explanation and practice of each of the skills listed above, refer to the Middle School and High School versions of USIP’s Peacebuilding Toolkits for Educators at www.buildingpeace.org/toolkit.

Objectives:

1. To understand the qualities of an effective mediator.
2. To understand the challenges of mediation.
3. To consider the role of trust in conflict management.
4. To improve students’ mediation skills

Age: 11 and above (U.S. middle school grade 6 and above)

Time: 60 minutes

Materials:

- *George Mitchell Note-Taking Sheet*
- *Mango Tree Scenario Handout*
- *Mediator Preparation Worksheet*
- *Role Preparation Worksheet* (for Adama and Saga roles)

PART 1: Viewing the George Mitchell Video (20 minutes)

Procedures:

1. Explain to students that a mediation is a negotiation involving a third party – someone who is not directly involved in the conflict. A mediator is the person invited into the negotiation process to help parties manage their conflict.

1. Ask the following questions and chart responses:

- What might lead people in conflict with one another to ask a mediator for help?

Possible responses include lack of trust, lack of communication, belief that the mediator has influence.

- What qualities do you think an effective mediator should have?

Impartial, trustworthy, adaptable, flexible, creative, calm, patient, knowledgeable, respectful, etc...

2. Tell students that they are going to watch a video about a mediator, George Mitchell, who played a vital role in bringing peace to Northern Ireland. Provide background on George Mitchell and the conflict in Northern Ireland taken from the attached backgrounder.

3. Distribute the *George Mitchell Note-Taking Sheet* and review it with students. Ask students to listen for answers to the questions while watching the four-minute video.

4. After the video, have students volunteer responses to the questions.

Debrief:

1. What made George Mitchell an effective mediator? What qualities does he have that you can add to the list the class started earlier?

2. What qualities do you think you have that would make you an effective mediator? Think of one quality you have and one you need to work on and share this with the person next to you. *Have volunteers share their responses with the whole group.*

3. Why is trust so important in conflict management? What happens when trust is broken?

4. How can you build trust?

5. How can you use in your daily life the mediation skills that George Mitchell used in an international conflict?

George Mitchell Note-Taking Sheet

Directions: Listen for answers to the following questions while watching the video about George Mitchell. Take notes in the spaces below.

1. Why was George Mitchell invited to Northern Ireland?

2. What was the biggest obstacle to overcome in bringing both sides together?

3. How did George Mitchell help bring peace to Northern Ireland? Give two examples.

Background for George Mitchell Witness Video

George Mitchell is an American statesman. He was a U.S. Senator who was appointed by President Clinton to help broker peace in Northern Ireland. He became the architect of the Good Friday Agreement, signed in 1998, which ended decades of violent civil war between Catholics and Protestants.

The Good Friday Agreement, also known as the Belfast Agreement, marked the end of thirty years of civil war in Northern Ireland.

During the “Troubles”, which began in the 1960s, more than 3,500 people were killed on both sides of the conflict. Armed groups on the nationalist side fought for political unity with the rest of Ireland, and armed groups on the unionist side fought for Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom. Many civilians were caught in the crossfire.

Even before this, there had been a long history of animosity between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland after centuries of British rule. In 1994, the British and Irish governments negotiated a ceasefire between the armed groups, and peace talks began.

George Mitchell had first become involved in Northern Ireland as part of an effort by the White House to boost the local economy. He was soon invited by the British and Irish governments to chair the peace talks.

Senator Mitchell won the respect of all sides for his skill and patience in brokering the landmark Good Friday Agreement in April 1998. This agreement was a historic compromise. For the first time, the two governments, along with parties from across the divide, agreed on a new political framework for Northern Ireland.

Both sides have committed themselves to working together to sustain the peace.

PART 2: Practicing Mediation (40 minutes)

Procedures:

1. Tell students that they will have an opportunity to practice mediation using a basic conflict scenario involving two families. Pass out the *Mango Tree* Handout and ask for a volunteer to read the scenario aloud. Explain that you will divide the class into groups of three, each with an Adama representative, a Saga representative, and a mediator who will help the families solve their problem. Tell them that first they will work in like-role groups to prepare.
2. Divide the class into groups of three and assign roles.
3. Have students meet in like-role groups (all mediators together, all Adama family representatives together, all Saga family representatives together) to prepare for the mediation. They should spend 10 minutes in these groups completing the *Mediation Preparation* Worksheet. Mediators can use the *Mediator Preparation* Worksheet to help them plan. If the groups are large you can subdivide them to work in like-role groups of 4 or 6 people.
4. Have students return to their triads and give them 15 minutes for the mediation.

Debrief:

1. What solutions did the groups come up with?
2. What different skills did the Adama and Saga representatives see the mediators use?
3. How and when were these skills used?
4. What did the mediators see as the biggest obstacle in the process?
5. In what ways would the mediation be more challenging if it were between warring countries instead of fighting families?
6. What did you learn from the role play that will help you in future conflict situations?

Mango Tree Scenario

Scenario

The Adama family and the Saga family have been neighbors for some time now. They have not been very friendly with each other during that period.

Recently, the mango tree that the Adama family planted has started to bear fruit. Some fruit-bearing branches of the tree are hanging in the Saga family's garden. The Saga family says that because these branches hang on their side, the mangoes belong to them. The Adama family states that because they planted the tree the mangoes belong to them.

The dispute is getting out of hand. Their neighbors have advised them to look for a third-party mediator to help them resolve this dispute.

Mediator Preparation Worksheet

Conflict: You will be mediating a conflict between the Adama and the Saga families.

Directions:

1. Begin the mediation by stating a few key ground rules:

- *All parties should use respectful language*
- *Parties should listen to one another and avoid interrupting each other.*
- *Cell phones must be put away.*

2. Then, listen to each party's perspective and try to understand their feelings, values, and concerns.

3. Allow each party to share their perspective without interruption. Try to identify their needs and move them past their demands (what they want) to see if they can find common ground based on their needs.

4. To help you prepare for the mediation, answer the following questions.

What problems do you see?

How can you manage them? What skills will you need to manage them?

What are the goals of each party? Where might these goals coincide?

What are some potential solutions to this conflict?

Role Preparation Worksheet (for Adama and Saga roles)

Adama Family

What is your objective in the mediation?
What do you hope will happen?

What are the key issues for you?

What are you willing to compromise on?
What are you definitely not willing to compromise on?

What strategy will you use as you approach the mediation?

What is your proposed solution?

Saga Family

What is your objective in the mediation?
What do you hope will happen?

What are the key issues for you?

What are you willing to compromise on?
What are you definitely not willing to compromise on?

What strategy will you use as you approach the mediation?

What is your proposed solution?

