

# Lesson 1.1

## Defining Conflict



### Rationale

Before students can begin to think about how to prevent or manage conflict, they must be able to identify it. This process begins with establishing a definition for conflict. In this activity, students begin to define conflict and explore various interpretations of conflict in order to further their understanding of the subject.

### Objectives

1. To consider definitions and interpretations of conflict as a way of forming one's own understanding of the subject.
2. To explore the role of conflict in our lives.

### Standards

- ◆ Culture
- ◆ Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- ◆ Global Connections
- ◆ Civic Ideals and Practices

**Time:** 110 minutes for parts 1 and 2

### Materials

- Chart paper
- Markers
- Various newspapers and news magazines that illustrate personal, local, national, and international conflicts. (Possible source: *New York Times Upfront* newsmagazine for teens. Current and past issues online at <http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/upfront/index.asp>)
- Quotes on Conflict and Conflict Management* Handout to be cut into strips
- Describing Conflict* Worksheet
- The Blind Man and the Elephant* Extension Handout



60 minutes

## Part 1

### Procedures

#### Defining Conflict (30 minutes)

- Write the word “conflict” in the middle of the board/overhead/chart paper. Ask students to list on a piece of paper five words that they associate with “conflict.” Have students share one or more of their words, and make a word web radiating out from the word conflict on the board/overhead/chart paper as they share. As you make the web, try to arrange the responses into groups such as “emotions,” “current events,” “personal,” and so on. Keep the word web posted throughout the class, so students can add to it and refer to it during discussion.
- Debrief the word web with some or all of the following questions:
  - ◆ What are some similarities and differences in the words you gave? What might account for these similarities and differences?
  - ◆ What do these words say about how you feel about conflict? (Positive or negative? Why?)
  - ◆ How do these attitudes on conflict reflect the way people tend to respond to conflict? How might your attitude on conflict affect how you respond to conflict in your own life?
  - ◆ How might a conflict reflect a variety of responses at once?
  - ◆ Why do you think it is important for us to learn about and understand conflict?
- Teacher-led Summary: Summarize the activity by noting that across all human societies, the existence of conflict is an inevitable and normal part of life. We encounter conflict at home, in school, at work, on the street. People often see conflict as something negative, something to avoid, a reason to fight, and less often as an opportunity to learn, change, and grow. This is because most of us are never taught ways to deal with conflict constructively. Yet conflict in itself is neither negative nor positive; it is neutral. The people experiencing conflict are the ones who determine its value, and how they choose to interact determines whether it is constructive or destructive. Note also that conflict can occur on many levels. It can be personal, local, national, or international. Ask students to identify examples of conflict at each of these levels.
- Tell students that they will now work together to identify the components that make up a conflict by developing a definition of it. Divide students into groups of three or four.
- Tell each group to come up with a working definition of conflict. Ask them to consider what conflict means, what it sounds like, what it feels like, where it happens, and any other relevant information that will help create a written description of what the word means.
  - As they work, write on the board “Components of Conflict,” with the five “w’s” in a row below as a guide: who, what, when, where, why.
  - Have each group write their definition on a piece of chart paper or overhead transparency.
  - Have each group take a turn coming to the front of the room to share their definition. Invite a recorder from each group to post their definition on the board or place it on the overhead, and read the group’s definition. As the recorder reads the definition, ask other groups to identify key words that answer any of the five w’s and write them below the word on the board to which it corresponds.

#### Extension Activity 1

##### Understanding the Language of Conflict through Metaphors

Ask students to explain the definition of a metaphor and give examples. One definition is: “A figure of speech in which an implicit comparison is made between two unlike things that actually have something in common.”

Note that metaphors are commonly used in every day language to give physical attributes to nonphysical things, for example, our views on peace, conflict, or our worldview.

Share the following metaphors on conflict (on board/overhead/chart paper):

- ◆ Conflict is a battle where only one can be left standing.
- ◆ Conflict is a labyrinth with no way out.
- ◆ Conflict is an invitation for dialogue.
- ◆ Conflict is a dance.
- ◆ Conflict is the wind’s resistance setting a kite into flight.
- ◆ Conflict is a grain of sand in an oyster, sometimes resulting in a pearl.
- ◆ Conflict is the pain in our body, telling us that something needs attention.
- ◆ Conflict is fire, offering both the potential for destruction, and a source for warmth and light.

*(continued on next page)*

- d. When the groups are finished sharing, use this collective list of key words, to create a class definition of conflict. Ask students to select from these key words and try to create a class definition based on the groups' work.
6. Continue the discussion, using some or all of the following questions:
- ◆ Why do conflicts occur? Over what?
  - ◆ Is a fight different than an argument?
  - ◆ What is the difference between conflict and violence?
  - ◆ Why do conflicts become violent?
  - ◆ What are some of the similarities between conflicts at a personal, local, national, and international level?
  - ◆ What are ways conflicts can be positive or have good endings?
  - ◆ How do you feel when you have successfully resolved a conflict?
  - ◆ What skills or strategies did you use to resolve it?
  - ◆ Describe a conflict that helped you learn something about yourself or others.
  - ◆ What do you think the role of perception is on conflict? (Stress the importance of perceived differences, and that it can be over relationships, information, interests and expectations, resources, and/or values.)

### Understanding Conflict (30 minutes)

1. Distribute the image of the jazz musician/woman, or project it on a screen. Ask students to analyze the image and share what they see. Do they see a jazz musician or a woman? Inform students that there is no right or wrong answer to this question.

Once students have shared their interpretations, invite students to help others see what they see in the image.



2. Lead a discussion using some or all of the following questions:
- ◆ How did you feel if/when someone insisted on seeing something different than what you saw?
  - ◆ Is one perception more correct than the other?
  - ◆ How can differences in perception lead to conflict?
  - ◆ If conflict is based on perceived differences of incompatible needs and interests, how do you go about helping to resolve conflict?
3. Use the discussion on varying perceptions to explain to students that people view and understand conflict in different ways.

Explain that the objective of metaphor analysis is to determine the associative meaning within the metaphor. Divide students into groups and assign each group a metaphor. Have them answer the following questions about their metaphor.

- ◆ What perspective on the nature of conflict does this metaphor express? (positive, negative, or neutral?)
- ◆ How does your metaphor either coincide with or contradict the associations with conflict shared earlier in the lesson?
- ◆ What does the metaphor suggest about the role that each party plays in conflict?
- ◆ What does the metaphor suggest about the distribution of power in conflict?
- ◆ How might the perspective on conflict within the metaphor influence one's response to conflict?

Create groups of three to five people or continue in the groups already formed. Challenge each group of students to come up with their own metaphors on conflict. Offer students alternative presentation styles. For example, they can draw an image to describe their metaphor, act it out, or create a human sculpture. Invite students to share their homemade metaphors with the class and analyze each metaphor using the same questions above.

As a further extension to this activity, ask students to research local, national, or international conflicts and identify any references to metaphors on these conflicts to analyze and present to the class.

**Note:** USIP's Peace Terms defines conflict as follows: An inevitable aspect of human interaction, conflict is present when two or more individuals or groups pursue mutually incompatible goals [glossary.usip.org](http://glossary.usip.org).

**Note:** Perception is subjective. In conflict, we often only see one side of the truth. Conflict can happen when people believe their perceptions and refuse to acknowledge another person's perception as valid. Because perceptions are personal, what some believe is "right" others may believe is wrong. Sometimes a third party is necessary to give those in conflict a chance to reframe their views.

4. Have the students return to their small groups and give each group one of the quotes from the *Quotes on Conflict and Conflict Management Worksheet* (cut the sheet up and have each group pull one quote from a hat; or write the quotes on sentence strips and have students choose from them). Have each group discuss the meaning of their quote.
5. Have each group share with the class what they believe their quote means. Give them the option to share their interpretation of the quote in writing, through artwork, or physical acting. With the sentence strip option, have each group hang their quote on the board and write their interpretations on the board below. The groups can do all of this writing at once; students may then be given the opportunity to gallery walk among the quotes, and add to the interpretations.
6. After the groups share, the teacher may enhance some of the quotes' viewpoints toward conflict by providing a bit of context on the authors of the quotes.



**50 minutes**

### Extension Activity 2

Invite students to research a particular author of one of the quotes and how what they did in their life and work reflected their quote on conflict.

### Extension Activity 3

Remind students that conflict often arises when the parties involved differ in their perception of the problem. Distribute *The Blind Men and the Elephant* Handout and have students read it. Discuss the fable using the following questions.

- ◆ What do you think the lesson of the fable is?
- ◆ How does it relate to perception and conflict?
- ◆ What are some examples of situations in real life that result in misunderstandings because of different points of view? What are some steps that could resolve these situations?

## Part 2

### Applying Our Knowledge of Conflict (40 minutes)

1. Tell students that now that they have made their own definition of conflict, and looked at definitions from other people in other times and places, they will apply their knowledge of what conflict is by finding examples of conflict in the world today. Ask students for examples of different levels of conflict: personal, local, national, and international (beyond U.S. borders). Be prepared to share a local or national conflict from your community and country. International examples include the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Afghanistan, the conflict between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government, or the conflict in Darfur.
2. Distribute a range of newspapers and news magazines. Have students work in their groups to search newspapers and news magazines for examples of modern conflict. Teachers may facilitate this search for articles as appropriate to the age and experience of their students in the following ways:
  - a. Provide the news magazines to older, more independent learners and ask them to find examples of conflict;
  - b. Choose an age-appropriate variety of articles for younger or needier readers. Ask students to choose and read articles that describe conflict at the personal, local, national, and international level. Personal examples might be intrapersonal, e.g., an ethical dilemma or interpersonal, e.g., an argument.
3. Explain to students that they will analyze a real-life conflict. Pass out the *Describing Conflict Worksheet* to each group. Read the questions for each part of the worksheet together so students understand their task. Instruct each group to complete the analysis for its article. Circulate among the groups to address questions on meaning and context of the articles and about how to answer the questions on the worksheet.
4. Have each group share a brief summary of their article and their conflict analysis with the class. Assess students understanding of conflict through this process.
5. Summarize the activity with students by asking the following questions:
  - ◆ What were common themes within the scenarios?
  - ◆ What did you find challenging or helpful in analyzing the conflict?
  - ◆ What is the value of analyzing conflict?
6. Collect the articles that students analyzed and keep them for lesson 2.1.

### **Discussion: How can we use our knowledge of what conflict is? (10 minutes)**

Conclude the lesson by having a whole class discussion using some or all of the following questions:

- ◆ Why is it important to understand conflict in order to manage it?
- ◆ Is it possible for conflict to have a positive impact? How?
- ◆ In what ways can a conflict be beneficial?
- ◆ How can negative conflicts be resolved more positively?
- ◆ What sorts of people deal with conflict? Are there particular careers or situations when conflict analysis would be a useful tool? (teachers, parents, government officials, military, NGOs, volunteers, and attorneys all deal with conflict as part of their jobs; everyone deals with conflict as part of being human.)

#### **Assessment:**

Group definitions, completed conflict analysis chart, class discussions

#### **Extension Activity 4**

If time allows, select one group to develop an unmoving scene to represent their conflict. An unmoving scene can also be described as a living statue or a frozen pose. For example, if the conflict is two local land owners in a conflict over a land dispute and their communication has broken down, resulting in a stand-off, the unmoving scene of this conflict could be two students in a frozen pose in which one of the land owners has an aggressive face and with their hands thrown up in the air showing frustration. The other has their arms crossed and has turned their back, showing they refuse to listen. Invite a few students one at a time from the other groups to physically move the people's positions to change the scene, thereby creating a different situation that may reflect a resolution of the conflict. Invite discussion on these alternate images. What is happening? What would be required (e.g., resources and people), to create this new scenario of the conflict? What would be the obstacles? What would be gained from this scenario?

**Note:** The U.S. Institute of Peace focuses on conflicts beyond U.S. borders. These conflicts may be interstate (between countries, e.g., Arab-Israeli conflict) or intrastate (between groups within a country, e.g., the Lord's Resistance Army and the government in Uganda).

## Lesson 1.1 HANDOUT: QUOTES ON CONFLICT AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

(Cut into strips)

Peace is not the absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means. —Ronald Reagan

Aggressive conduct, if allowed to go unchecked and unchallenged, ultimately leads to war. —John F. Kennedy

Today the real test of power is not capacity to make war, but capacity to prevent it. —Anne O'Hare McCormick

You can't shake hands with a clenched fist. —Indira Gandhi

There should be an honest attempt at the reconciliation of differences before resorting to combat. —Jimmy Carter

If you want to make peace, you don't talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies. —Moshe Dayan

When you negotiate an agreement, you must remember that you are also negotiating a relationship. —Harold Nicolson

A diplomat must use his ears, not his mouth. —Komura Jutarō

Truth springs from argument amongst friends. —David Hume

Don't be afraid of opposition. Remember, a kite rises against; not with; the wind. —Hamilton Mabie

The harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly; it is dearness only that gives everything its value. —Thomas Paine

Never ascribe to an opponent motives meaner than your own. —John M. Barrie

An eye for an eye makes us all blind. —Mahatma Gandhi

If war is the violent resolution of conflict, then peace is not the absence of conflict, but rather, the ability to resolve conflict without violence. — C.T. Lawrence Butler, author of *On Conflict and Consensus. A Handbook on Formal Consensus Decision-making* (2000)

Work on developing a cooperative relationship, so when conflict comes, you believe you are allies. —Dean Tjosvold

You can outdistance that which is running after you, but not what is running inside you. —Rwandan Proverb

Difficulties are meant to rouse, not discourage. The human spirit is to grow strong by conflict. —William Ellery Channing

## Lesson 1.1 WORKSHEET: DESCRIBING CONFLICT

Name of Article:

Author/source/date of article:

Summary of article (five sentences or fewer):

Describe the conflict in the article. What is the disagreement? What are the needs or differences shown by each group? How have they (or have they not) resolved the conflict? What are potential consequences if it is not resolved?

Identify the different perspectives that the parties bring to this conflict.

Which five words from the word web would you use to describe the conflict in your article?

Which of the quotes analyzed earlier in class relates to your quote? How does it relate?



## Lesson 1.1 EXTENSION HANDOUT: The Blind Man and the Elephant

*The Blind Men and The Elephant* retold by Donelle Blubaugh

Long ago six old men lived in a village in India. Each was born blind. The other villagers loved the old men and kept them away from harm. Since the blind men could not see the world for themselves, they had to imagine many of its wonders. They listened carefully to the stories told by travelers to learn what they could about life outside the village.

The men were curious about many of the stories they heard, but they were most curious about elephants. They were told that elephants could trample forests, carry huge burdens, and frighten young and old with their loud trumpet calls. But they also knew that the Rajah's daughter rode an elephant when she traveled in her father's kingdom. Would the Rajah let his daughter get near such a dangerous creature?

The old men argued day and night about elephants. "An elephant must be a powerful giant," claimed the first blind man. He had heard stories about elephants being used to clear forests and build roads.

"No, you must be wrong," argued the second blind man. "An elephant must be graceful and gentle if a princess is to ride on its back."

"You're wrong! I have heard that an elephant can pierce a man's heart with its terrible horn," said the third blind man.

"Please," said the fourth blind man. "You are all mistaken. An elephant is nothing more than a large sort of cow. You know how people exaggerate."

"I am sure that an elephant is something magical," said the fifth blind man. "That would explain why the Rajah's daughter can travel safely throughout the kingdom."

"I don't believe elephants exist at all," declared the sixth blind man. "I think we are the victims of a cruel joke."

Finally, the villagers grew tired of all the arguments, and they arranged for the curious men to visit the palace of the Rajah to learn the truth about elephants. A young boy from their village was selected to guide the blind men on their journey. The smallest man put his hand on the boy's shoulder. The second blind man put his hand on his friend's shoulder, and so on until all six men were ready to walk safely behind the boy who would lead them to the Rajah's magnificent palace.

When the blind men reached the palace, they were greeted by an old friend from their village who worked as a gardener on the palace grounds. Their friend led them to the courtyard. There stood an elephant. The blind men stepped forward to touch the creature that was the subject of so many arguments.

The first blind man reached out and touched the side of the huge animal. "An elephant is smooth and solid like a wall!" he declared. "It must be very powerful."

The second blind man put his hand on the elephant's limber trunk. "An elephant is like a giant snake," he announced.

The third blind man felt the elephant's pointed tusk. "I was right," he decided. "This creature is as sharp and deadly as a spear."

The fourth blind man touched one of the elephant's four legs. "What we have here," he said, "is an extremely large cow."

The fifth blind man felt the elephant's giant ear. "I believe an elephant is like a huge fan or maybe a magic carpet that can fly over mountains and treetops," he said.

The sixth blind man gave a tug on the elephant's fuzzy tail. "Why, this is nothing more than a piece of old rope. Dangerous, indeed," he scoffed.

The gardener led his friends to the shade of a tree. "Sit here and rest for the long journey home," he said. "I will bring you some water to drink."

While they waited, the six blind men talked about the elephant.

"An elephant is like a wall," said the first blind man. "Surely we can finally agree on that."

"A wall? An elephant is a giant snake!" answered the second blind man.

"It's a spear, I tell you," insisted the third blind man.

"I'm certain it's a giant cow," said the fourth blind man.

"Magic carpet. There's no doubt," said the fifth blind man.

"Don't you see?" pleaded the sixth blind man. "Someone used a rope to trick us."

Their argument continued and their shouts grew louder and louder.

"Wall!" "Snake!" "Spear!" "Cow!" "Carpet!" "Rope!"

"STOP SHOUTING!" called a very angry voice.

It was the Rajah, awakened from his nap by the noisy argument.

"How can each of you be so certain you are right?" asked the ruler.

The six blind men considered the question. And then, knowing the Rajah to be a very wise man, they decided to say nothing at all.

"The elephant is a very large animal," said the Rajah kindly. "Each man touched only one part. Perhaps if you put the parts together, you will see the truth. Now, let me finish my nap in peace."

When their friend returned to the garden with the cool water, the six men rested quietly in the shade, thinking about the Rajah's advice.

"He is right," said the first blind man. "To learn the truth, we must put all the parts together. Let's discuss this on the journey home."

The first blind man put his hand on the shoulder of the young boy who would guide them home. The second blind man put a hand on his friend's shoulder, and so on until all six men were ready to travel together.

Source: United States. Peace Corps. World Wise Schools. Looking at Ourselves and Others. Comp. Paul D. Coverdell. Peace Corps. Web. May 6, 2011. <http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/stories/stories.cfm?psid=110>