



Lessons for Upper Elementary School

Lesson 1: What Does Conflict Mean?

Adapted from the *Peacebuilding Toolkit for Educators – Middle School Edition*, United States Institute of Peace, <https://www.usip.org/public-education/peacebuilding-toolkit-educators>

Grade: 3rd – 5th grades

Objectives:

1. To develop definitions of conflict.
2. To recognize that there are many associations with the term ‘conflict.’
3. To explore the positive and negative aspects of conflict.
4. To reflect on conflict’s role in our lives.

Common Core State Standards:

- Language Standards – Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: Grades 3-5 Standards 4, 5, and 6

Materials:

Blackboard or whiteboard, chalk or markers, *Positive and Negative Conflict Words* worksheet, blank notecards, pencils, *Exit Pass* worksheet

Time: 45 minutes

Procedures

I. Essential Questions

1. How can we define conflict?
2. When can conflict be good?

II. Motivation/Introduction (10 minutes)

1. Explain to students that today you will be talking about conflict.
2. Tell students that you will read a list of words that have to do with conflict. Share that each statement will begin with “When I say conflict, you think of...” Each time you finish the statement with a new word, they should clap if they think the word has a lot to do with conflict; snap if they think the word has a little to do with conflict; and stay silent if they think it has nothing to do with conflict. Encourage students to look around the room and listen with each word to be aware of their classmates’ responses. Note that there are no right or wrong answers for this activity.

3. Have some or all of the following words written on the board. Start each statement round with, "When I say conflict, you think of..." and use the words to finish each sentence. You can leave some of the words out if students do not know their definitions.

war, difference, useful, right, disagreement, everywhere, anger, normal, fight, wrong, selfish, problem-solving, good, violence, learning, important, unfair, help, avoid, people, hopeful

After each statement, note how loud the response was for that word. One way to do so is to circle the words that get many claps, do nothing to the words that got lots of snaps, and put a line through words that got no response.

4. After you finish the activity, explain to students that the words that had the "loudest" response (the circled ones) were the ones that they think have the most to do with conflict, and the words that had the "quietest" response (the ones crossed out) were the words that they think have nothing to do with conflict. Briefly discuss the activity using some or all of the following questions:
 - Which words had the "loudest" response? Why do you think we were loudest for these words?
 - Which words had the "quietest" response? Why do you think we were quietest for these words?
 - Is a fight different than a disagreement? Why do conflicts become violent?
 - Do you think conflict is always bad or negative? Can it be positive or have a good ending?

III. Teacher Directed (10 minutes)

1. Explain that often we only think of conflict as being bad or negative. But sometimes conflict can be positive or have a good ending. Tell students that we are going to explore how conflict can be both negative and positive in our lives.
2. Assign students a partner and pass out the *Positive and Negative Conflict Words* worksheet. Using the words on the board, students should work with their partner to write down the words they think are good aspects of conflict in the *Positive* column and words that are negative aspects of conflict in the *Negative* column. You should do a few first as a class to model the activity.
3. When everyone is done, or after 5 minutes, have one pair of students share where they placed the words. Have the two columns drawn on the board, and write the words in the appropriate column as they are shared. Encourage students to use thumbs up or down to show if they agree or disagree with the placement of each word. Take note of which words get any thumbs down.
4. If there are thumbs down for any words, tell students that you observed thumbs down for that word and ask them to share why they disagreed with the placement. You can do this for a few words.
5. Then, ask:
 - When you disagreed about the placement of a word, was that a conflict? Why or why not?

- Was it a positive or negative conflict? Why?
 - Did that conflict help us in our learning? How so?
6. Give students the following definition of conflict: Conflict is a normal part of everyday life. It happens when people or groups pursue goals that are not compatible with each other or when they want different things. (See glossary.usip.org for USIP’s official definition of conflict)
 7. Explain that conflict can be handled without violence, and can be changed into something positive. Conflict can be positive because it makes us see something from someone else’s perspective, like you saw that there were different perspectives on whether a word is positive or negative. A conflict can also be positive because it gives us an opportunity to learn something or to solve a problem. Then give an example from your own life (ex: I told my friend some good news that was a secret. I found out that she had shared my secret with someone else, and I was mad at her. We argued about it, and she apologized. I was glad to know that she was sorry and that we could talk about what mad me mad.)
 8. Ask:
 - Why was this a positive conflict?

IV. Guided Practice (15 minutes)

1. Explain to students that they are going to think of some examples of positive conflict, too.
2. Divide students into groups of two and give each student a blank notecard.
3. Lead students in a Think-Pair-Share:
 - Ask students to silently think of one example of a positive conflict and to write it down on their notecards. They can refer to the words in the positive column to give them some ideas. Ask students to use complete sentences and their best handwriting, as you are going to display this notecard.
 - Students then share their examples with their partner.
 - Call on a few students to share their examples with the whole class.

Teacher note: For more advanced groups, divide students into groups of two, and provide each group with a notecard that has one of the positive words about conflict written on it. You can use the words in the positive column from the board, and can use them more than once, depending on class size. As a pair, students should define their word, discuss how it relates to conflict, and share a personal connection to that word. Following group work, students share with the class.

4. Collect notecards so that you can display them.

V. Independent Practice/Exit Pass (10 minutes)

Distribute the *Exit Pass* worksheet. Ask students to draw an example of a conflict that they have experienced that had a good ending in the box. On the back, they should describe the conflict and how it was positively resolved.

Positive and Negative Conflict Words

Positive Words	Negative Words

Exit Pass

Directions: Draw an example of a conflict that you have experienced that had a good ending. On the back, describe the conflict and how it was positively resolved.



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