



COMPASS POINTS

"Every time you state what you want or believe, you're the first to hear it. It's a message to both you and others about what you think is possible. Don't put a ceiling on yourself."

—Oprah Winfrey

OVERVIEW

Students evaluate an idea or proposition, sharing their opinions with other students, and take a stance on the matter.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time of the year
- To provide students with an opportunity to practice intellectual courage
- When discussing an idea or proposition with students
- To get students to move around the classroom in a productive manner

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 30 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- College

MATERIALS

- 4 poster boards
- Post-its
- Paper
- Pencil/pens

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Evaluate various sides of a proposition or idea
- Share their personal opinions on a proposition or idea
- Identify gaps in their knowledge that if filled can better inform a decision

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a moment to think of an idea you recently heard or a proposition you are trying to decide on.
- Reflect on the following questions: What excites you about the idea or proposition? What worries you? What else do you need to know to better evaluate the idea or proposition?
- With your answers in mind, take a stance on the idea or proposition, or decide on the steps you will take to move forward in your decision. If time permits, you might even consider sharing your responses with a friend or colleague and hearing their responses to better inform your own stance.

INSTRUCTIONS

OVERVIEW

- Before the lesson, put posters around the room with the letters E, W, N, and S.
- Present students with a proposition or idea. This can be a school policy proposal for which you would like to hear their input, a proposition for a classroom change, an idea that a character in a novel is trying to decide on, a policy a politician has been discussing on the news, a solution researchers have proposed for a major problem, or any other proposition relevant to your lesson, classroom, or school goals.
- Give students post-its and ask students to post their notes on each poster to share their “excitements,” “worries”, “needs”, and “stances/steps/suggestions.”

- Explain that on the east wall, students should place a post-it that describes what excites them about the idea or proposition? What's the upside?
- On the west wall, they should describe what they find worrisome about the idea or proposition? What's the downside?
- On the north wall, they should describe what else they need to know or find out about this idea or proposition? What additional information would help them to evaluate things?
- Finally, on the south wall, students should describe what their current stance or opinion is on the idea or proposition? How might they move forward in their evaluation of the idea or proposition?
- Have students share their responses in small groups and have each group summarize the stance they would take. Alternatively, if time permits, have each student share one of their post-it responses for the east, west, or north wall with the entire class.
- Then, as a class, consider what steps should be taken with regards to the proposition or idea that was posed.

CLOSURE

Have students write a short reflection about exercise. They may use the following questions:

- What surprised you from the discussion with your classmates?
- Did students share similar excitements or worries?
- Was it easy for you to share your responses with other students? How did it feel to hear other students' responses and to realize that they also had their own worries and needs for more information to better understand the idea or proposition?
- Did your stance change after hearing others' responses?
- What did you learn or what is the main thing you'll take away from the discussion?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How did students respond to the exercise? What would you do the same or differently the next time?
- How might this exercise help encourage students to be more courageous in voicing out their opinions?
- Have you noticed a change in how students respond to new ideas or propositions?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

According to research, social courage is a type of courage referring to intentional, deliberate, altruistic behavior that may damage a person's self-esteem in the eyes of others. For example, in school students may demonstrate social courage by telling an adult if they see other students engaging in behavior that is harmful.

One [study](#) suggests that employees who demonstrate social courage (e.g., more willing to present new ideas and voice concerns) contribute to the success of the organization. Social courage is also associated with a willingness

to provide negative feedback when needed, effective leadership, and organizational citizenship behaviors, or voluntary, positive actions and behaviors that help support the flow of work.

Furthermore, [research](#) finds that adolescents showed greater moral courage—a willingness to speak up in the face of injustice—when parents provided opportunities for them to voice their opinions regarding family decisions.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

For many students, asking questions or making comments in class can be challenging. This is particularly the case in middle school and high school when students are at a [developmental stage](#) in which they place a great deal of weight on what their peers think of them.

Intellectual courage is an intellectual virtue that is similar to social courage in that it allows individuals to speak up even if they are nervous about how they will be perceived by others. When cultivated, intellectual courage can increase students' willingness to take intellectual risks, such as asking questions in class or voicing their opinions, instead of being paralyzed by fear of embarrassment in front of the class. Such intellectual risks are essential to students' intellectual growth and academic success.

SOURCE

The Compass Points thinking routine was developed by [Project Zero](#), a research center at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.