



WHERE WE STAND

“The ultimate measure of a person is not where one stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where one stands in times of challenge and controversy.”

–Martin Luther King, Jr.

OVERVIEW

Students examine how they face everyday moral dilemmas and consider who and what influences their reactions when conflicts arise.

LEVELS

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- As part of a larger unit or discussion around bullying, social exclusion, etc.
- As part of a focus on courage and doing the right thing

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 1 hour

MATERIALS

- Handout: [Scenario List for grades 3-5](#) or [Scenario List for grades 6-8](#)
- Graphic organizer: [Scenarios for grades 3-5](#) or [Scenarios for grades 6-8](#)
- Pens or pencils
- “Agree,” “Disagree” and “Not Sure” signs

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Articulate their own points of view in difficult situations or dilemmas
- Identify the different roles people play in conflicts
- Understand what motivates people to take on different roles in conflicts

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
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Have you noticed or heard about any bullying incidents at your school? What happened, and what were the responses (if any) from other students, as well as from faculty and/or staff?
- Do you have thoughts about how students *should* respond when and if they witness different kinds of bullying or other negative behaviors? For example, do you think they generally should tell an adult, intervene directly, stay out of it, or do something else (or a combination)? Why? How do you think you should respond to such situations, and why?
- Could any of the issues addressed in this activity (i.e., bullying) be challenging or even triggering for you or any of your students? How will you prepare yourself and your students, and how will you navigate challenges if they arise?
- Are your students likely to have significant differences of opinion about these issues and how they might be addressed? How will you handle possible disagreements between them, or between their opinions and your own?

INSTRUCTIONS

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How do you decide where you stand in a difficult situation?
- What factors help people decide how to act or what to do when faced with a conflict?
- (For vocabulary extension) What are upstanders, bystanders and whistle-blowers?

INTRODUCTION

- This is the first lesson of the series “[Dealing with Dilemmas: Upstanders, Bystanders and Whistle-Blowers](#),” which invites students to examine how they would respond to everyday dilemmas that test their character and value system. By working through three or four scenarios, students will figure out where they stand, literally and figuratively, when conflicts arise. What would they do? What choices would they make? They will also have the opportunity to think about how and why the actions of their classmates influence their choices.

- Of the many positive character traits addressed in a character education curriculum, *courage* is the foundation for helping students stand up for what is right, become leaders and achieve their goals. Creating, role-playing, analyzing and reflecting on scenarios that require courage can help students develop skills to resist negative peer pressure, speak out against injustice and make choices based on core values.

VOCABULARY

- **bystander** [**bahy**-stan-der] (*noun*) A person present but not involved; chance spectator; onlooker.
- **courage** [**kur**-ij, **kuhr**-ij] (*noun*) The quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger or pain without fear; bravery.
- **dilemma** [dih-**lem**-uh] (*noun*) A situation requiring a choice between equally undesirable alternatives; any difficult or perplexing situation or problem.
- **upstander** [**up**-stan-der] (*noun*) One who speaks up and becomes involved.
- **whistle-blower** [**hwis**-uhl bloh-er, **wis**-] (*noun*) A person who informs on another or makes public disclosure of a wrongdoing.

THE ACTIVITY

- Explain to students that they will be taking part in an exercise in which they will explore similarities and differences in opinion. Give students a series of scenarios (the graphic organizers for [grades 3-5](#) or [grades 6-8](#)). Ask them to fill out each sheet on their own, agreeing or disagreeing with the protagonist's action in each scenario and stating the basis for their opinion.
 - The completed forms will come into play later in a larger group setting, but for now, allow students to process their own thoughts as they complete the sheets.
- While the students are filling out the graphic organizers, place the "Agree" and "Disagree" signs on opposite sides of the room, leaving plenty of space between them for the "Not Sure" area.
 - Be sure to have an area available where the scenarios can be written out or projected for all to see.
- Explain to students that they will now discuss the scenarios as a group. They will begin by reading the scenario on the board and refreshing their memory, if they need to, by looking back at what they wrote on their own sheet. If they strongly agree with the statement, they will move to the "Agree" side of the room. If they strongly disagree, they will move to the opposite side where the "Disagree" sign is posted. If they are unsure of their feelings on the issue, they will stand at the midpoint where the "Not Sure" sign is placed.
 - It may be helpful to begin with a warm-up question or two so that students will grasp what it is they are being asked to do. Some examples:
 - *I prefer pancakes to waffles.*
 - *I prefer summer to winter.*
 - *Broccoli is the best-tasting vegetable.*

- Now, one by one, present three or four grade-appropriate scenarios from the Scenario List ([grades 3-5](#) or [grades 6-8](#)). Once the students have chosen their sides, allow them two minutes to share with those they are standing with why they chose the side they did. Then, ask individual students to share with the entire group why they decided to stand where they are, either by reading aloud from their forms or by describing the basis of their opinion.
 - Ask students to use “I” statements in responding to why they chose their location.
 - You might want to limit the responses to one minute or choose just one person in each of the three areas to respond to each question.
 - Chart key words that students use for the post-activity discussion.
- As students listen to their classmates explain why they moved to the “Agree,” “Not Sure” or “Disagree” areas, let them know that they are free to change positions if they hear something that alters their original viewpoints.
 - Your role in this portion of the activity is to keep everyone involved, ensure that students articulate thoughtful reasons for their selected positions, and not allow the discussion to become too personal or raucous.
 - Once the students get the hang of this exercise, they should engage in a fluid, lively and respectful dialogue with your guidance.
- Vocabulary extension activity:
 - After all three or four scenarios have been discussed, bring the group back together. Write the words *upstander*, *bystander* and *whistle-blower* on the board. Ask the students what these words mean to them, if anything. Chart key words from three to five responses. Provide the proper definition for each word from the glossary.
 - Next, ask students to think of adjectives that can be added to the words *upstander*, *bystander* and *whistle-blower* that will give a richer understanding of a person’s traits, motivations, and feelings and not just to describe their actions. For example: *scared bystanders*, *curious upstanders* or *nervous whistleblowers*.
 - Using the newly defined descriptors, close the lesson by asking the students to label or identify the protagonist in each of the scenarios they engaged with earlier.
- Other extension activity ideas:
 - In small groups of four, role-play one or two of the scenarios, ending with a positive outcome.
 - Have students create their own scenarios, positioning the protagonist in the role of upstander, bystander or whistle-blower. Ask students the critical question of what they would do if they were presented with this dilemma.
 - To enhance follow-up discussions, choose a selection of picture books from this suggested reading list:
 - *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander* by Barbara Coloroso
 - *How to Lose All Your Friends* by Nancy Carlson
 - *The Brand New Kid* by Katie Couric
 - *How Humans Make Friends* by Loreen Leedy

- *My Secret Bully* by Trudy Ludwig
- *Trouble Talk* by Trudy Ludwig
- *Just Kidding* by Trudy Ludwig
- *Say Something* by Peggy Moss
- *The Recess Queen* by Alexis O’Neill
- *Don’t Laugh at Me* by Steve Seskin and Allen Shamblin
- *Odd Velvet* by Mary E. Whitcomb

SOURCE

The original activity, [Where We Stand](#), is featured on the [Learning for Justice](#) website.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How did students react to the scenarios? To what extent were there differences of opinion in terms of how to respond? Were students able to have a respectful and thoughtful discussion?
- What insights did you gain about how your students think about bullying and difficult social situations? Are there any issues you want to address further with them?
- Going forward, how can you continue to integrate both social-emotional and ethical considerations into the classroom/school environment?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Discussing moral “dilemmas”—situations with multiple potential solutions—gives students the chance to thoughtfully express their own ideas and [consider and respond to](#) those of others. These types of discussions can help students think in a more critical and sophisticated way about the [social and ethical challenges](#) they may face.

In situations involving bullying, specifically, studies have shown that students’ perceptions of peer norms—e.g., that their peers think standing up for others is the right thing to do—might make them [more likely to intervene](#) and less likely to passively bystand.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Bullying among school-aged youth is both [common and harmful](#). Most students [see bullying as wrong](#), but they often [don’t intervene](#) when they witness it, for a [variety of reasons](#).

Growing their awareness of why they might not step up to help someone in a group situation—such as watching a student being bullied—may help students to overcome the [internal and external barriers](#) that keep them from reaching out. In addition to practices such as this one, teaching students [mindfulness](#) and [emotion skills](#) can also cultivate their ability to overcome personal distress when seeing someone suffer, making them more likely to offer service.

For educators, better understanding students’ thought processes around these issues can help in efforts to reduce bullying, increase upstanding (standing up for others by intervening or whistle-

blowing), and make school a safer and happier place for everyone.

TERMS OF USE

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