TEACH DEMOCRACY

Two Visions of Government

Civil Conversation Lesson Plan

Materials

- Handout A: Middle School Text
- Handout B: Civil Conversation Guide
- Teacher Presentation

Standards and Topics

- CCSS.SL.6-12.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively
- CCSS.R.6-12.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- C3.D2.Civ.8.6-8. Analyze ideas and principles contained in the founding documents of the United States, and explain how they influence the social and political system.
- CA HSS.7.11 Students analyze political and economic change in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries (the Age of Exploration, the Enlightenment, and the Age of Reason).

Topics: Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, government, the Enlightenment, U.S. history

Overview

In this Civil Conversation, students discuss ideas about the role of government from Enlightenment thinkers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. First, they examine a text that offers multiple perspectives on the issue of proper governance. Next, they participate in a Civil Conversation on the text. In this structured discussion method, students are encouraged to engage intellectually with challenging materials, gain insight about their own point of view, and strive for a shared understanding of issues.

Objectives

1. Evaluate Enlightenment ideas on the role of government
2. Participate effectively in a civil discussion by expressing clear and persuasive arguments, while building on others' ideas
3. Consider other perspectives with a sense of empathy

Procedure

I. Focus Discussion

A. Hold a brief discussion by asking students: Is it ever OK to give up freedom for the sake of safety? Explain.

B. Tell students that they will be able to discuss different ideas on the role of government. Their task today is to consider these ideas by examining multiple perspectives from history.

II. Reading: Two Visions of Government

A. Briefly provide students with an overview of the purpose and rationale of the Civil Conversation activity. Use the overview above to help you.

B. Give each student a copy of **Handout A: Two Visions of Government**.

C. Distribute a copy of **Handout B: Civil Conversation Guide** to each student to complete as they read. Each student should fill in their own guide.

III. Civil Conversation

A. Divide the class into groups of 3–4 students. You may want to have each group select a leader who will get the discussion started, ensure the group stays on-task, and finishes on time.

B. Determine how much time the groups have to complete the discussion. (You will know what's best for your students, depending on the length of the reading and how experienced your students are in student-directed discussion.)

- **Time:** Conversations for classroom purposes should have a time limit,

generally ranging from 15 to 45 minutes and an additional five minutes to reflect on the effectiveness of the conversations. The reflection time is an opportunity to ask any students who have not spoken to comment on the things they have heard. Ask them who said something that gave them a new insight that they agreed or disagreed with.

- **Small Groups:** This discussion strategy is designed to ensure the participation of every student. Groups of 3-4 students are ideal. If you are scaffolding text for various reading levels, group students who will use the same text together.

C. Review the rules of a Civil Conversation (listed under Step 3 on the Guide) and direct the groups to follow the instructions on the guide to get started.

D. Let groups know you will be circulating to listen in on their conversations and that each person in a group is expected to participate. The goal is for everyone to contribute equally to the conversation.

E. If necessary, remind groups of the time and urge them to move to the next steps.

IV. Assessment / Closure

A. After the groups have completed their discussions, debrief the activity by having the class reflect on the effectiveness of the conversation:

- What did you learn from the Civil Conversation?
- What common ground did you find with other members of the group?
- Ask all participants to suggest ways in which the conversation could be improved. If appropriate, have students add the suggestions to their list of conversation rules.

B. If you want to also debrief the content of the Civil Conversation, you might ask students:

- Was there any surprising information you learned from the reading? What was it?
- What are the problems with John Locke's or Thomas Hobbes' vision of government?
- Which vision of government is better? Why?

C. For assessment, look for the following on each student's Civil Conversation Guide:

Step 2 – A, B: Basic understanding of text.

Step 2 – C, D: Text-based arguments.

Step 2 – E: Appropriate and compelling questions about the text.

Step 4 – A: Level of participation (should be "about the same as others").

Step 4 – B: Answer is appropriately related to topic/issue presented in text.

Step 4 – C, D: Specificity/text-based.

D. For additional assessment, you may want to collect the article/text students used to assess the annotations they made in terms of connections to prior knowledge/experience, questions they had while reading, and comments they made.

Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679)

In 1642, a civil war broke out over who would rule England—Parliament or King Charles I. After nine years, the civil war finally ended with Parliament victorious. Charles was beheaded. Soon after, an English **philosopher**, Thomas Hobbes, wrote *Leviathan*. In it, he made a defense of the absolute power of kings. The title of the book referred to a leviathan. This is a mythological, whale-like sea monster that devoured whole ships. Hobbes likened the leviathan to government, a powerful state created to impose order.

Hobbes began *Leviathan* by describing the state of nature where all individuals were equal. Every person did what they needed to do to survive. As a result, everyone suffered from "continued fear and danger of violent death." He thought that the life of man in a state of nature would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

In the state of nature, there were no laws or police to restore order. The only way out of this situation, Hobbes said, was for individuals to create a supreme power to impose peace on everyone.

Hobbes based his idea about forming government on English contract law. Hobbes said that the people agreed among themselves to "lay down" their natural rights of **equality** and freedom and give absolute power to a ruler, or *sovereign*. The sovereign, created by the people, might be a person or a group. The sovereign would make and enforce the laws to secure a peaceful society. This would make life, **liberty**, and property possible. Hobbes called this agreement the "social contract."

Hobbes believed that a government headed by a king was the best form that the sovereign could take. Placing all power in the hands of a king, Hobbes argued, would mean a more sure and consistent exercise of political authority. Hobbes also claimed that the social contract was an agreement only among the people and not between them and their king. Once the people had given absolute power to the king, they had no right to revolt against him.

Hobbes warned against the church meddling with the king's government. He feared religion could become a source of civil war. He thought that the church should be a department of the king's government. That way, the king could closely control all religious affairs. In any conflict between **divine** and royal law, Hobbes wrote, the individual should obey the king or choose death.

philosopher a person who studies ideas about life, knowledge, and right and wrong

equality the idea that all people should be treated the same and have the same rights

liberty the freedom to speak and make choices without unfair control

divine related to God or a higher power

John Locke (1632 - 1704)

John Locke was born shortly before the English Civil War. Locke studied science and medicine at Oxford University and became a professor there. He sided with the Protestant Parliament against the English King James II in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. This event reduced the king's power and made Parliament the major authority in the English government.

In 1690, Locke published his Two Treatises of Government. He generally agreed with Hobbes about the brutality of the state of nature. He also agreed that a social contract was needed to assure peace. But, he disagreed with Hobbes on two major points.

First, Locke argued that natural rights such as life, liberty, and property existed in the state of nature. He believed they could never be taken away or even voluntarily given up by individuals. These rights were "inalienable" (impossible to surrender). Locke also disagreed with Hobbes about the social contract. For him, it was not just an agreement among the people, but between them and the sovereign (preferably a king).

According to Locke, the natural rights of individuals limited the power of the king. The king did not hold absolute power, as Hobbes had said. Locke believed that the king acted only to **enforce** and protect the natural rights of the people. If a sovereign **violated** these rights, the social contract was broken. If this happened, the people had the right to revolt and establish a new government. Less than 100 years after Locke wrote his Two Treatises of Government, Thomas Jefferson used his theory in writing the Declaration of Independence.

Locke spoke out for freedom of thought, speech, and religion. But, he believed property to be the most important natural right. He declared that owners may do whatever they want with their property as long as they do not invade the rights of others. Government, he said, was mainly necessary to promote the public good. This meant protecting property, encouraging **commerce**, and little else. "Govern lightly," Locke said.

Locke favored a representative government such as the English Parliament. It had two chambers. The House of Lords was made up of noblemen, who inherited their positions. The House of Commons was made up of members elected by voters. But he wanted representatives to be only men of property and business. Only adult male property owners, he believed, should have the right to vote. Locke was reluctant to allow the masses of people without property to vote or serve in government. He believed that they were unfit.

The **supreme** authority of government, Locke said, should reside in the law-making legislature, like England's Parliament. The executive (prime minister) and courts would be creations of the legislature and under its authority.

enforce to make sure a rule or law is followed

violated to break a rule, law, or agreement

commerce the buying and selling of goods and services

supreme the highest or most powerful

Name: _____

Two Visions of Government

Civil Conversation Guide

Step 1: Read.

A. Read through the entire selection without stopping to think about any particular section.

B. Re-read the selection and annotate ("talk to") the text:

- Underline the main/most important points. You can comment on these points in the margins.
- Circle words or phrases that are unknown or confusing to you.
- Write down any questions you have in the margin labeling them with a "?".
- Draw an ➡ in the margin next to text that connects to something you know from outside the text. Note what the connection is, such as a news item or personal experience.

Step 2: Think about the reading to prepare for the discussion.

A. This reading is about...

B. The MAIN POINTS are:

Two visions of government: Which one is better?

C. In the reading, I agree with:

D. In the reading, I disagree with:

E. What are two questions about this reading that you think could be discussed? (The best questions for discussion are ones that have no simple answer and that can use the text as evidence.)

1.

2.

Step 3: Discuss and Listen.

You will have _____ minutes to discuss. Your goal is to engage with each other and the text to gain insight about your own point of view while finding a shared understanding of the issue.

Start by taking turns sharing your answers to the questions in Step 2, sections A-D. Then, you will likely find at least one discussion question at the end of the reading. If time permits, you can discuss questions you came up with in Section E above.

Rules for a Civil Conversation

1. Everyone in your group should participate in the conversation.
2. Listen carefully to what others are saying.
3. Ask clarifying questions if your do not understand a point raised.
4. Be respectful of what others are saying.
5. Refer to the text to support your ideas.

Step 4: After your conversation...

A. Compared to others in your group, did you speak? ___ Less than, ___ About the same as, ___ More than others.

B. Note some of the ways you added to the discussion.

C. What evidence did you use from the text to add to the discussion? Why was this evidence helpful?

D. What did you learn about the topic from the Civil Conversation? (Be sure to reference the text!)