

Navigating Controversial Topics

**In the Classroom
and at the Village**

Presentors

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Premise

- Every culture has topics or beliefs that can be seen as controversial.
- It is important to learn how to address controversial topics thoughtfully
- Different approaches are needed depending on the topic

Controversial topics may

- Differ from US norms
- Be contrary to villager/ student belief systems
- Be difficult due to personal/ family connections or experiences
- Include new or difficult information

Examples from CLV include

- Ecological and environmental disasters and potential disasters
- Migration, Refugees, Asylum seekers
- Experiences of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, disability, economic inequality, poverty
- Prison, internment camps, indigenous boarding schools
- Certain historical events

Other examples?

Why address these topics?

CLV Mission:

A courageous global citizen lives responsibly by:

- appreciating and seeking to understand diverse cultural perspectives;
- communicating with confidence and cultural sensitivity in multiple languages;
- respecting human dignity and cultivating compassion;
- engaging critically and creatively with issues that transcend boundaries; and
- advancing a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world for all.

Why else?

- Being able to learn about and address difficult topics is a life skill that can be transferred to:
 - Personal relationships
 - Working environments and relationships
 - Any number of careers

How do we address these topics in a safe and meaningful way?

- All lessons must take place within the context of respect.
 - All questions, feelings, ideas, etc. are heard without judgement.
 - All speech and actions remain positive (i.e. no bullying, name calling, demeaning, etc).
 - Everyone involved must feel that they have a say/ are being heard, but can also choose not to speak
- Activities and discussions need to be carefully thought through and planned.
 - The method of instruction should vary depending on the sensitivity of the topic.

	(Potentially) Highly Sensitive	Moderately Sensitive
Examples	<p>Asylum seeking/ refugees</p> <p>treatment of indigenous people</p> <p>gender and sexuality</p> <p>experiences with disability</p> <p>slavery/internment</p>	<p>Oil drilling</p> <p>Whaling</p> <p>WWII</p> <p>economic inequality</p> <p>nuclear power</p> <p>overfishing, world hunger</p>
Method	<p>Moderated discussions</p> <p>Interpretive activities (listen or watch, then debrief)</p> <p>Careful situation recreation or example scenario</p>	<p>Simulations</p> <p>Information finding activities</p> <p>Debates</p> <p>Round table discussions</p> <p>Making comparisons</p> <p>Pros and Cons</p> <p>Support an opposing view</p>

During the activity

- Monitor the participants.
 - Make sure everyone is remaining respectful and feels safe.
 - It is ok to remove participants from the situation if necessary.
- Check in with the participants.
 - When conducting a full-blown simulation, check in when you see possible distress.
- Don't be afraid to alter course or stop early.
- Always finish with a debrief and return to topic later if necessary.

Comments or

Questions