

3e

Valuing Different Views: Taking a Stand on Media Violence

Violence is a controversial issue that touches us all either through the media or in person. In the public debate about media in our culture, concerns about violence in media often float to the top. While violence is a very common word, it is also a complex concept that contains many different insights and interpretations. In this activity students are required to “take a stand” about issues of violence in order to demonstrate how we all carry different perspectives and understandings. A key facet of understanding is empathy and that requires learning how to value different points of view.

Objectives: Students will be able to...

1. Recognize and appreciate the value of multiple perspectives and differences of opinion.
2. Build empathy and open-mindedness for other points of view.
3. Become aware of the complexity of social and cultural issues such as violence in media.

Correlation With McRel National Standards:

Language Arts Standards and Benchmarks

- Grades 3-5: (S9/B4)
- Grades 6-8: (S9/B7)
- Grades 9-12: (S9/B6, B12)

Behavioral Studies Standards and Benchmarks

- Grades 6-8: (S1/B4)
- Grades 9-12: (S1/B7)

Materials/Preparation:

1. Prepare a space for students to move from one side of the room to the other. Mark a line on the floor with masking tape. At one end of the line place a sign on the wall that reads “Violence” and on the opposite wall place a sign that reads “Not Violence.”
2. Chart paper or board space to write down class responses.
3. Paper and pencil for each student to write.
4. Poster paper and markers enough for groups of three students each.

Teaching Strategies:

I. Defining “violence

- Explain that the current controversy about media violence assumes that everyone knows – and agrees – on what “violence” is – or isn’t. This may not be easy. Create a class chart and record answers to the questions:
 - ? What words are associated with the word “violence”?
 - ? What actions are associated with violence?
- Have the students write their own answer to the question: “What is violence?” Allow for time since this can be a difficult task. Encourage students to keep trying until they come up with at least a sentence or two that they can contribute to building a class definition.
- Ask volunteers to read their definitions, add any new words or ideas to the class chart on defining violence. In between presentations, discuss why it can be so difficult to define something that seems so simple.

II. Specific scenarios

- Explain that students will now have a chance to see how their definitions hold up in specific scenarios. Inform them that you will be asking a series of questions about violence and media violence and each person needs to “take a stand” – walking to the place on the line that represents their position on the question – at either end of the line or somewhere in-between.
- As you ask the following questions (or others that you may want to substitute), stop periodically and ask different students to explain their “stand,” especially if a question creates a clear split within the group. After a question that generates lively discussion with various points of view, invite students to change their “stand” if they’ve been convinced by something they have heard. The goal is to experience that “violence” is a difficult concept to pin down because each of us has our own interpretations based on past experience, gender, age, and many other factors.
- Questions:
 - ? Is hitting someone violence?
 - ? If a parent slaps a child, is that violence?
 - ? Is calling someone an insulting name violence?
 - ? In a movie, when the bad guy dies in a hail of machine gun fire, is that violence?
 - ? On the news, if they report a murder and you see a body covered with a blanket behind police tape, is that violence?
 - ? Is *thinking* about killing someone violence?
 - ? What about plotting to put a bomb in a public space? Is that violence?
 - ? On TV, when a character is murdered off screen, is it violence?
 - ? When there’s a spectacular car crash in an auto race, is that violence?
 - ? What if no one is hurt and the driver walks away?
 - ? If a cartoon character is smashed by a boulder, is that violence?
 - ? Would you consider live news coverage of the aftermath of a terrorist bombing where many people died, violence?
 - ? Is live news coverage that shows victims wounded or killed in a natural disaster, like a fire or an earthquake, violence?
- Next, form groups of three, and *as a team* have them write a new definition of violence that reflects their individual insights as well as the experience of “taking a stand,” and experiencing others’ points of view. Give each group a piece of poster paper and markers and ask them to write their final definition large.
- Display the posters and compare the definitions, pointing out similarities and differences.
 - ⤴ For older students, try to craft a definition for “What is violence?” that the whole class could agree on.



Teaching Tip: Watch this Lesson!

Watch a master teacher conduct this lesson plan in the video, *Mind Over Media: A Video Introduction to Media Literacy*. Cue the video to the beginning of part 3 where high school teacher Kenny Smith is leading his class through this exercise. (This low-cost video is available through CML/GPN’s online catalog at www.medialit.org/catalog. Put product number “1351” in the keyword search window.)