Resolving Conflict

Overview:

This lesson illustrates the nature of conflict and the challenges created when individuals have to depend on the community.

Objectives:

1. Correlate International Peace Day and the current implications of social conflict.

2. Reinforce the concept of peace through mathematical and scientific application of game theory.

3. Infer ethical implications of non-zero-sum games.

4. Make recommendations in a persuasive essay for an ethical course of action during conflict.

Materials:

- Small slips of paper

- Classroom board

- Writing journals

- Pens and pencils

Procedure:

1. Introduce students to International Peace Day by explaining that every citizen is responsible for resolving conflicts without violence. Refer to the International Day of Peace website for more information.

2. Ask students to brainstorm a list of current international conflicts and record their responses on the board.

3. Apply the concept of peace through a game-theory model. Tell students to imagine the following scenario:

An eccentric philanthropist offers $3,000 to any member of the class who wants it. All you have to do is write a note saying, "Yes, I want it." Now, this same philanthropist also believes in rewarding unselfishness and cooperation, so if everybody writes a note saying, "No, I don't want it," then every member of the class will get $10,000. If just one person writes "Yes, I want it," he or she will get $3,000 and everyone who writes "No, I don't want it" will get nothing. What do you do? Do you go for the guaranteed $3,000, or do you trust the rest of the class to get $10,000?

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4. Allow students time to consider their responses, but don't allow them to discuss it. Have them write their responses along with their names on sheets of paper. Collect the papers and tally the results. Did everyone say "No"? Chances are, at least one person said "Yes."

5. Discuss why the results came out the way they did. Ask: What was your reasoning for your choice? Are humans instinctively selfish and distrustful?

6. Tell them this scenario is an example of what mathematicians and social scientists call game theory. Specifically, this is a non-zero-sum game, which involves two people who each fare best if he or she independently decides to cooperate; each fares the worst if he or she cooperates while the other person defects.

7. Discuss the ethical implications of non-zero-sum games and how the dilemma might demonstrate a lack of Six Pillar values. For instance:

    *   Trustworthiness: Do the students consider the importance of honesty or loyalty in their decision-making?

    *   Responsibility: If students choose the $3,000, do they show any interest in being accountable?

    *   Fairness: Do the students pursue only their self-interest or do they consider what is fair for all stakeholders (those who have a stake in the decision)?

    *   Caring: Do the students show concern for each other's welfare?

8. Have them write a persuasive essay defending their position on the dilemma. They should state their opinion, provide detailed supporting evidence, and use strong persuasive language.

9. Ask them how this dilemma can result in a positive resolution. Discuss how several of today's global conflicts could be improved by similar tactics. After all, it takes the amalgamation of individual efforts to make positive impacts on society.

Extension: Have students plan a citizenship project such as a recycling program or donation drive to further emphasize the relationship between self-interest and the common good.
The eccentric philanthropist scenario was adapted from a game-theory webpage by Paul Cox.

Related websites:

UN International Day of Peace

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McREL standards

Language Arts

Standard 5. Applies basic troubleshooting and problem-solving techniques.

Level IV Benchmark 11. Understands causes and critical issues of problems (e.g., personal, social, ethical considerations).

http://www.mcrel.org/Standards-benchmarks/