

Lesson-1: What does controversy mean?

How to prepare:

Discuss the meaning of controversy. Ask students to identify situations in literature and history in which individuals, groups or governments were clearly right or wrong. Those are situations about which civilized people agree, and because people agree, those situations are not controversial.

Provide examples such as: Should democracy be promoted? Should children be left on their own? Tell students that no one is likely to speak out against democracy or speak in favor of leaving children unattended. Neither is a controversial topic. An issue becomes controversial when significant differences of opinion exist over which possible alternatives should be selected. Explain that the class will consider an issue controversial if 70% of students or fewer take one side and at least 30% take another side or sides.

Using specific newspaper stories that apply, discuss questions dealing with democracy or leaving children unattended that are controversial: Should the U.S. offer military support to sustain the rule of a democratically-elected leader? Should the U.S. work with non-democratic governments to maintain order? Should parents who leave their children unattended receive jail terms? Should children be removed from homes where they have been left without caretakers?

Explain that free speech or open discussion of controversial issues characterizes democracy. Let students know that you will provide opportunities for their study and research and open discussions (collaborative conversations).

Provide print and/or digital editions of area newspapers.

What to do:

Have students locate behaviors, attitudes and beliefs in the print and/or digital editions of newspaper that they think civilized people will support (or object to). They should share what they choose in writing and explain why. Remind them to be specific, so anyone reading what they have said will know which behavior, attitude or belief they refer to.

Ask students to make their selections in pairs or small groups if you think they will benefit from hearing other perspectives. They should identify the most often chosen examples and the reasons given for choosing them and look for examples that may be controversial or not be accepted by 70% of the class or more.

Students should present their findings, using graphs that show how often a behavior, attitude or belief was chosen. If they think any students chose controversial subjects, they should present those and allow the class to vote by secret ballot to see if the subjects indeed are controversial. If students indicate an

interest in discussing the pros and cons of any issue that proves to be controversial, apply approaches outlined in subsequent lessons.