

## Civility—Key to Self-Government

In this lesson students participate in or observe both noncivil discussion behavior and civil, successful discussion behavior, and learn that when groups meet, respectful behavior and formal rules of behavior are essential self-governance skills.

GRADES	4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> or older
TIME	1 class period
SUBJECTS	History, Civics, Language Arts, Speech, Social and Emotional Learning
STRATEGIES	Class participation
TAGS	Bill of Rights, Constitution, Amendment, jingle
LESSONS	Civility, civil discourse, civil debate, compromise, Congress, Constitutional Convention, self-governance

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### Concepts and Principles

- Self-government depends upon the reaching of agreement through respectful discussion (civil discourse).
- In meetings, following rules about how the meeting and discussions will operate helps.
- Treating others with civility requires self-control as well as respect for others.
- Reaching agreement often requires compromise.
- Disrespectful discussion causes anger, discord, and does not result in finding workable solutions or relations.

### Vocabulary/Glossary

- civility politeness and courtesy in behavior or speech, sometimes formality
- civil discourse – respectful conversation intended to improve understanding, usually involving telling only the whole truth as clearly as possible without repeating yourself, using moderate, unaggressive voice and facial expressions, staying attentive and thoughtful about other points of view

- civil debate – formal, polite argument following formal rules and civil discourse
- compromise – an agreement that is reached by each side making concessions
- discord – disagreement and negative feelings among people
- gavel – a wooden hammer used by pounding on a surface in meetings or court to begin, bring order, or adjourn the meeting.
- moderator – director; emcee
- to have the floor – to be the only person allowed to speak and be listened to at that time in a formal gathering

## Objectives

1. By the end of this lesson, students will know:
  - Civil discourse = polite discussion = civil discussion = civil debate
  - Respectful discussion (civil discourse) is the process that was used to create the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and all laws enacted by Congress ever since.
  - Some of the formal rules of civility and civil discourse that are often followed in meetings
  - Knowing, understanding, and using the practice of respectful discussion is a skill needed by all Americans: treating all with courtesy even when not in agreement, clearly explaining your views and reasons for them, listening to carefully and trying to understand others' views, seeking areas of agreement, compromise when needed and possible
2. Students will begin using techniques of respectful discussion.

## Materials Needed

Pre-chosen YouTube video vignettes (optional - see below)

Gavel or something that serves as one

Copies of scripts for student actors

## Procedure – Setting the Stage

Read to yourself, present to students in your own words, and discuss:

Our whole nation is a nation based on the civic principles and governmental functions set out in the United States Constitution. As the document that sets forth the most basic ideas and rules upon which our government is built and operates, it was staggeringly hard to create. Men who had been studying and thinking about these things for years were sent from every state. At first some

had differing ideas about almost every detail of the government they were creating.

They all agreed that all American governments – the governments of each of the states and the federal government (the government of the whole country) – should serve the people and protect their rights. But what kind of government can do that? They had to invent it and agree upon what they came up with.

Some big questions were about:

- which powers and laws would be left to each person, to each state, and to the federal government
- how the federal legislature could fairly represent people from states with fewer people as well as states with big populations
- how to divide power within the federal government
- how to make sure no branch of government exceeds the power it is given

But how could these men, many of them total strangers to one another, work together day after day, week after week, all together through the steaming hot months of summer to find the best answers?

## **Civility**

First and foremost, they had to be extremely polite and act respectfully in all ways - behavior, facial expression, tone, words AT ALL TIMES in and out of meetings to everyone, regardless of whether they agreed with that person's ideas or even liked the person.

Manners matter. Enormously. Because these men had learned how to discuss and even argue respectfully and politely, different ideas could all be heard without creating anger and without creating enemies.

## **Formal Rules**

In addition to remaining polite to one another, as part of effectively working together, in meetings everyone must follow polite rules of behavior. Some of these rules are:

### **Formal Rules of Civil Discourse**

- speak only when it is your turn
- present your thoughts and the reasons that support them clearly and briefly,
- talk no longer than the time allowed, even if you have more to say

- talk only about one agreed upon subject
- at all times (not just during the formal discussion) refrain from personal ridicule or insult of those with different ideas
- never interrupt, distract others, or heckle
- listen attentively to and try to fully understand what others say
- if possible, try to find ways to combine important elements of their ideas with what you consider to be your most important ideas to compromise and reach agreement
- the amount of time each person can speak is set before the discussion
- the moderator does not take part in the debate; rather he is the person who says whose turn it is to speak and calls a halt if the speaker talks too long

## **Exercise 1 Demonstrating Two Types of Discussions**

### **Uncivil Debate**

Use a You-Tube clip from a notorious Congressional disrespectful debate or act it out:

Setting – Constitutional Convention

Cast – (3 + remaining students as the other delegates in the meeting)

- Georgia delegate - comes from a big state with a small population and believes that Congress should have the same number of representatives from each state
- Massachusetts delegate - comes from a small state with a big population and believes that the number of representatives should be a set percentage of all the people in each state.
- Moderator - says whose turn it is to speak and stops them when their time is up
- Remainder of delegates - seated

### **Script for Uncivil Debate**

*Three characters are seated. Moderator - seated facing the rest of the class.  
Delegates from GA and MA are seated among the rest of the class/delegates.*

- Moderator: (*Raps gavel repeatedly until everyone is silent and attentive*) (*stands*) Gentlemen, I call this session to order. On the question of forming a Congress with fair representation, the honorable delegate from Georgia, you have the floor. (*Moderator sits*)
- GA Delegate: (*Stands and speaks loudly, angrily*) Each state should have the same number of representatives, and anyone but a fool can see the fairness of this (*at this point, he is interrupted by MA Delegate who*)
- MA Delegate (*jumps up and yells angrily*): No, that is unfair! My state has many times the number of people as your state! There should (*Moderator interrupts, yelling, while the two delegates continue yelling over each other and other delegates start arguing as well*)
- Moderator: (*yelling and pounding with gavel*) Silence, Delegate from MA! Sit down! Order! Order! (*Delegates keep getting louder and finally calling each other names and showing anger*)

What did they accomplish? (No agreement, frustration, personal anger; dislike of opposers)

### Civil Debate

Either show a productive respectful debate video from YouTube or Colonial Williamsburg, or act it out:

Setting – Constitutional Convention

Cast – (3 + remaining students as the other delegates in the meeting)

- Georgia delegate - comes from a big state with a small population and believes that Congress should have the same number of representatives from each state
- Massachusetts delegate - comes from a small state with a big population and believes that the number of representatives should be a set percentage of all the people in each state.
- Moderator - says whose turn it is to speak and stops them when their time is up
- Remainder of delegates - seated

## Script for Civil Debate

*All characters are seated. Moderator - seated facing the rest of the class.*

*Delegates from GA and MA are seated among the rest of the class/delegates.*

- Moderator: (Raps gavel once. All are immediately silent and attentive. He stands to speak) Gentlemen, I call this session to order. We will follow Roberts Rules of Order. In this session we will discuss the question of forming a Congress with fair representation. Two speakers will present the main differing views. Each will be given up to 5 minutes to speak. The honorable delegate from Georgia, you have the floor. (Moderator sits.)
- Georgia delegate: (Stands up; politely nods his head to first the moderator and then his audience, waits a beat and then in a clear and respectful voice says) We are the United STATES of America. Each state is a unique political body and an equal member of this nation. Each state therefore should have the same number of representatives to the federal government. That way the voice of each state will be given equal weight and be fairly represented. Without this equality, the needs and concerns of my state and all states with small populations will be ignored. Gentlemen, Georgia will never agree to a federal constitution that does not treat it equally. (The delegate then sits. He and audience remain silent.)
- Moderator: (stands) Thank you, sir. Now the honorable delegate from Massachusetts will speak. (sits)
- Massachusetts delegate: (Stands up; politely nods his head to first the moderator and then his audience, waits a beat and then in a clear and respectful voice says) I understand the concerns of the states with small populations. Their concern makes sense, and this gentleman from Georgia has explained it well. But it is citizens, wherever they live, rather than each state, who should be represented equally. My state has far more citizens than Georgia does. It would not be fair if 1 Georgian would have as many representatives in Congress as 60 citizens from my state would. The number of representatives to Congress should be the same percentage of the population in every state. If each Congressman is to represent 1,000 people in Georgia, then each Congressman should represent 1,000 people in Massachusetts. It does not matter if that means 12 representatives from Massachusetts and only 2 from Georgia. (The delegate then sits. He and audience remain silent)
- Moderator: (stands, waits a beat, and then speaks respectfully and clearly) What both men said is clear and of great importance; now let us work together to find a way to meet the needs expressed by both delegates. How

can our government be made up of both congressmen who represent states fairly and represent people fairly? Suggestions?

## Discussion

- What has been accomplished? (Clear explanation of the issue to be solved, good will maintained, so men want to work together to solve it)
- How was the issue just debated solved in the United States Constitution? (Answer: Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution establish 2 houses of Congress: the House of Representatives in which delegates are selected by equal percentage of population, and the Senate whose number of delegates from each state is equal (2 per state).

## Exercise 2: Using civil debate on a classroom issue

### Setting

Pretend that this grade has 2 times as many boys as girls. Each homeroom can send 3 representatives to a meeting to decide which games will be played during a field day. How should these representatives be chosen?

### Cast

- Person 1 says simple election from all the students who want to be delegates and top 3 win.
- Person 2 says that the gender of the students should be fairly represented. Therefore, there should be 2 boy representatives and 1 girl, since there are 2 boys to every 1 girl in the room, and the election should allow voters to vote for boys and girls separately.
- Person 3 Moderator

### Procedure

- Decide on the rules of civil debate
- Hold the debate
- Vote afterwards which way of selecting representatives is better

### Discussion

What has been accomplished?

## Extensions using civil debate to understand elements of the Constitution

Apply the same technique to debate areas of the Constitution and Bill of Rights. If desired, allow teams to formulate the two arguments and select a speaker.

1. How long should Senators serve?

- Person 1 argues they should be elected for the same length of time as representatives (2 years) so new people can be elected often
- Person 2 argues they should serve 6 years, so they become experienced

2. Does the First Amendment right to free speech mean you can say anything you want without any limits?

- Person 1 argues no limits
- Person 2 argues that there are limits; ex: you can't tell hurtful lies, say hate words, cause danger (like yelling "fire" in a crowd), or spur people to do harm to others

3. Use same technique to debate limits on right to not quarter soldiers in your home

4. Use same technique to debate limits on right to Right to keep and bear arms

5. Use same technique to debate limits on right to right to freedom of the press

## Continuing Application

Use civil debate technique consistently when reaching other classroom decisions.