

Overview:

This short lesson introduces students to basic concepts and practices for communicating in a cooperative manner. Cooperative communication requires skills like active listening, effective speaking, thoughtful question asking, and receptive body language. This lesson includes a student handout on cooperative communication skills and an accompanying exercise for applying active listening to real-life scenarios.

Learning Outcomes:

- Critically examine historical events to consider possible alternative approaches to similar current or future situations.
- Develop ability to discuss complex issues and ideas with people of different views, learning to speak with clarity and respectfulness.
- Build interpersonal communications skills to listen and respond to various types of conversations and materials to participate in respectful discourse.

Information for Instructor:

Student handout included, “Active Listening and Cooperative Communication.”

This activity can be adapted to the time available to the instructor and can be applied to any context of the teacher’s choosing.

Instructions:

Give students handout, “Active Listening and Cooperative Communication.” Students may read through the handout individually or as a class. You can test the student’s understanding by asking questions about the information on the handout. Suggested time is 5 minutes.

Conduct activity on verbal blockers for students to practice cooperative communication strategies using a historical topic. For the activity, the teacher selects a historical issue where two parties have different stances. The activity works especially well for a context in which one group has more power than the other, and the party with less power is trying to achieve a certain goal or right. Students will role-play a scenario utilizing information about active listening and cooperative communication learned from the handout. In the first round, the parties will use verbal blockers and fail to achieve a meaningful outcome. In the second round, they will use their active listening skills and (hopefully) achieve a meaningful and positive outcome. Students will reflect on how cooperative communication is important

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for leaders and everyday citizens. Below is an example of applying this activity in the context of the women's suffrage movement in the US.

Applications:

Select a historical circumstance with a power dynamic such as women's rights, separate but equal, the labor movement, etc. Ask students to role play historical conversations about the issue, identifying different blockers that might have been used in the conversation which created barriers for the movement or cause. Students can imagine how utilizing active listening techniques to understand the problem might have changed history.

Example: Cooperative Communication: Women's Suffrage

Separate class into two groups. One group is assigned the role of "government" and the other half plays the role of "suffragettes."

In their groups, the suffragettes prepare and present their points to the government for why they want suffrage. The government responds using examples of verbal blockers. (Verbal Blockers: Advising, Judging, Reassuring/Minimizing, Analyzing, Questioning). The time allotted can vary as needed, suggested time is 10 minutes for preparation time and five minutes for presenting their points to the "government." Encourage the students to be creative and have fun.

Pause the role-play and redirect to now have the government respond with cooperative communication practices. Allow role-play time as needed, suggested time is 5 more minutes.

Reconvene the class for debrief questions.

- For the government side, which response felt more natural?
- Why might people in positions of power use verbal blockers?
- Even though government policies are set, are there significant related outcomes that might change by using cooperative communication?
- Reflect on the potential impact of active listening on your conversations with friends and family. Can we expect the power of active listening to impact high-level discussions in the same way it impacts our personal discussions?

Student Handout: Active Listening and Cooperative Communication

Introduction

We interact with people every day, and some of our interactions and conversations are easier than others. Sometimes, whether we intend it or not, conversations can get especially tense, controversial, or emotional – but that doesn't mean we have to let them turn divisive, hurtful, or destructive.

Difficult conversations are a fact of life; they can happen in your home, between friends and family members, in the workplace, and at high levels of government and decision making. Learning to communicate effectively and to listen to others is essential to healthy relationships and a functioning society. Luckily, there are simple skills and practices we can employ to make sure that we are building bridges, not burning them.

What you say and do can make or break a conversation, and it is important that you have the tools to *manage and not damage* the tone of the conversation.

The first component to any good conversation is considering what you bring and its impact. You can ask yourself questions like:

- Do I have a position in this conversation?
- What are my intentions/goals?
- What experiences have I had that might influence my perspective?

Another component to effective communication is body language, as not all communication is verbal. You might consider some nonverbal signals you respond to, and how your body language impacts the conversation. Nonverbal signals can include eye contact, posture, hand placement and gestures, proximity/usage of space, facial expressions, and tone.

Active Listening

The focus of this lesson is active listening. *Active listening* means hearing what someone says and proactively piecing together the message they are trying to convey. This requires prioritizing the person's message before your own opinions while they are speaking. A common tendency is to listen with the purpose of responding; active listening requires listening with the purpose of *understanding*. Components of active listening include:

- Asking for clarification when needed
- Leaving plenty of space for the person to elaborate/return to the topic
- Not interrupting
- Having **respect** for the other person *regardless of their views*.

Verbal and Nonverbal Blockers to active listening

Active listening can be challenging, but by reflecting on our own communication styles and being mindful of how we conduct ourselves during conversations, we can improve our communication skills and cultivate open and inviting environments. Some common verbal barriers to active listening include:

- Advising: “why don’t you just....” “If I were you....”
- Judging: “don’t get so uptight about it!” “I think you’re the one that has to....”
- Reassuring or Minimizing: “Don’t worry about it, you’ll do fine!” “cheer up! A month from now, it won’t even matter”
- Analyzing/Diagnosing: “What’s really bothering you is...” “your insecurities are causing you to be too sensitive”
- Questioning: “Why did you do that?” Have you considered just forgiving him?”

Luckily, by avoiding these barriers and employing cooperative communication strategies like reflection and inquiry, we can build our listening skills and pave avenues for empathy and understanding.

Cooperative Communication and Listening to Understand

Some components of cooperative communication include:

- Paraphrasing
 - Briefly restate their point in your own words
 - Focus on the speaker, e.g. “You are saying...”
 - Reflect on content and feeling
- Communicating openness
 - “Say more about...” “Can you give me a specific example of...?”
- Agreement stating
 - Acknowledging points where there is an agreement
 - “I can see what you are saying about...”

Another important component of cooperative communication is asking open questions. *Open questions* cannot be answered with a yes or no and are intended to open discussion and expand understanding.

There are different kinds of open questions you can ask, including probing, clarifying, justifying, and consequential questions. Some examples include:

- Probing Questions: “what about this concerns you the most?” “can you tell me more about how you feel?”
- Clarifying Questions: “when you say ‘the event’, what event are you referring to?” “You mentioned ‘they’, who specifically do you mean?”
- Justifying Questions: “earlier you said... and now I hear you saying...how are you moving forward?” “what I heard you say does not match my understanding; can you help me with my confusion?”
- Consequential Questions: “how do you think your current plan will change the outcome?” “what might the downside of your approach be?”

**Please note respect for other people regardless of their perspectives is of the utmost importance.*

**It is always okay to exit a conversation when you feel unsafe or disrespected.*

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