



Overview:

Students will be given a list of 6 or 7 historical or literary actors. They will be asked to rank the most to least responsible actors for a historical or literary event and then discuss reasoning with their classmates. The goal of this exercise is for students to think of how our different values impact the way we perceive events, responsibility, and the impact of actions.

This exercise can be used for review and discussion near the end of a unit in history, government, or even literature. It is a thought-provoking activity for students to apply their knowledge of a unit, identify key takeaways, and consider modern-day applications for governance and leadership.

Learning Outcomes:

- Are prepared to discuss issues and ideas with people of different views, learning to listen and ask questions with compassion, open mindedness, and respectfulness.
- Acknowledge that perceptions are influenced by various socio-cultural aspects. Develop an understanding of difference, cultivating empathy, and building cross-cultural competencies.
- Appreciate the economic, social, cultural, religious, and international conditions that help to shape our world.
- Move between concrete, narrative, and chronological learning and thematic, abstract, or conceptual learning.
- Understand the foundations of political thought and government systems and how different groups, organizations, and nations cause conflict, attempt to resolve conflict, and seek to establish order, security, and peace.

Information for Instructor:

This activity can be adapted to a specific unit and time period. Example handout, “Ranking Prompt – WWII” included below.

Instructions:

Give students a list of 5-7 historical or literary “actors”. Instruct students to rank “actors” in order of responsibility for a historical or literary event. An example handout for the context of WWII is included below. Allow 5 – 10 minutes, for students to rank their lists before discussing.

Once students have completed ranking based on personal reasoning, in groups of 3-4, students share and compare their lists, discuss their reasoning, then work together to identify the values elevated by

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each individual list. Suggested time is 10 - 15 minutes, but this can be adapted. As they try to identify values, they might discuss questions like:

- What prompted you to rank as you did?
- What values are evident in your ranking? (examples might be Justice, Citizen Engagement, Sanctity of Life, Independence of Thought, Equality, etc.)
- Does the discussion of reasons behind ranking confirm your list or lead you to re-evaluate your thinking?
- How does understanding the values underlying a position held by someone with a different perspective impact the way you think about the difference of opinion?

Invite groups to share their observations with the class. Then, bring the class back together for a debrief discussion.

- Was it easy to make your individual lists? Would it be easy for your group to agree on a single list? Why or why not?
- How do our values shape how we perceive justice, responsibility, and impact of actions?
- How can leaders govern people holding different values? Do we prioritize our own individual values or the values of the group we most identify with?
- How can we compromise when values are at stake?

Notes for the instructor:

- The time it takes for groups to agree (or disagree) on an order will vary, and the activity can be adapted based on the time available to the instructor.

Applications:

War (international, civil, regional wars); French Revolution and the Reign of Terror; American Revolution; American Civil War; Indian Removal Act; Chinese Exclusion Act; Atomic Bomb; Boston Tea Party; 30 Years War; any social and political movements that escalate into violent conflicts; etc. Famous literary and theatrical works like *Les Misérables* or *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

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There are seven historical “actors/forces” both individual and the collective represented. Rank these “actors/forces” in order of who is most responsible for WWII. In small groups of three or four, discuss your ranking and try to identify the values elevated by your list – what civic values does your list show as most important to you?

Hitler

Appeasement

White Supremacy

Citizen Apathy

Military Following Orders

Economic Hardship

Propaganda

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