JIMMY AND ROSALYNN CARTER SCHOOL FOR PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION
George Mason University

Values in Contrast Activity

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Overview:

In this interactive values-based activity, students examine how values influence public policy decisions during times of crisis. Students first reflect individually on four core values (achievement, stewardship, connectedness, and security) and consider how these values show up in their own lives. They then physically position themselves in the classroom based on which value they prioritize most.

Using a historical scenario involving population displacement caused by a natural disaster or war, students work in value-aligned groups to develop policy responses for a receiving country. After sharing and comparing policies, students reconsider their own value priorities, with the opportunity to change positions based on new perspectives. The activity intends to promote appreciation for complexity of policy decisions and room for reflective intellectual humility in addressing real-life scenarios.

Learning Outcomes:

- Analyze how values and beliefs influence public policy decisions, particularly during periods of crisis or instability.
- Evaluate multiple perspectives on historical and contemporary issues by comparing policy approaches shaped by differing value priorities.
- Communicate and justify policy positions using historical context and evidence, both orally and in writing.
- Reflect on how new information and dialogue can refine or reaffirm personal viewpoints, demonstrating civic openness and intellectual humility.

Resources for Instructor:

- Familiarity with a historical or historical-style example of population displacement (e.g., Irish Potato Famine, Dust Bowl migration, post-earthquake displacement, war-related refugee flows)
- Prepared definitions and examples of the four values
- Clear discussion norms to support respectful dialogue

Time / Materials Needed:

30–40 minutes total

- Values reflection and movement: 5 minutes
- Group policy discussion: 5 minutes

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- Group share-out: 10 minutes
- Repositioning and reflection discussion: 10 minutes
- Individual exit reflection: 5 minutes

Materials to Prep

- Four value signs posted in different corners of the room
- Scenario prompt (projected or printed)
- Chart paper or whiteboards (optional, for policy notes)
- Exit slip or reflection prompt (paper or digital)

Instructions for Activity:

1. Introduce the Values: Present four values with brief definitions and real-life examples. Ask students to silently reflect on how each value shows up in their own lives. Examples selected for this activity are:

   Achievement
   Emphasizing improvement, success, growth, and productivity.
   Example: Prioritizing growth, innovation, or working hard for advancement.

   Stewardship
   Responsibility for taking care of resources and not being wasteful.
   Example: Choosing to reuse, recycle, and not waste even when something is plentiful.

   Connectedness
   Emphasizing human rights, community, and shared humanity.
   Example: Caring about people beyond artificial dividing lines of towns, sports teams, nations, religions, race, etc.

   Security
   Prioritizing safety, stability, and risk reduction.
   Example: Working to have financial security, being aware of dangers and using caution, and protecting those you are responsible for.

   Values can change/be adjusted according to the problem/issue being covered in the unit selected to use this activity.

2. Choose and Move: Identify four corners of the room, each labeled with one value. Ask students to move to the corner representing the value they prioritize most right now, acknowledging that all values matter and they may hold most of them very high.

3. Introduce a problem from a unit you are currently studying such as mass displacement due to famine or war. Frame students in each of the four corners as policymakers in a country receiving displaced populations.

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4. Group Policy Development: Students discuss and outline policies their value would prioritize considering borders, aid, economic planning, environmental impact, etc. Encourage them to consider benefits, trade-offs, and risks.

5. Share Out: Each group presents its policy approach compared to what they know happened historically. Instructors should highlight the contrasts and tensions between values.

6. Reflect and reposition if you would like: Ask students to reflect on what they heard. Invite students to switch corners if their thinking has been broadened. Discuss the idea that often when asked our position, we don't fully consider all that we might like to. The ability to shift our position with additional information is important.

7. Reflection Discussion: Ask students in each corner to share why they stayed or switched. Emphasize that changing one's mind is part of civic learning.

8. Exit Reflection (optional) Students respond briefly in writing to a prompt such as:
   Which value feels most important to you now, and why? What influenced your thinking? Or how did this activity influence your perspective about the shaping of your opinions?

Possible Applications:

- **History & Social Studies:**
  Immigration, refugee policy, constitutional debates, global conflicts, civic decision-making
- **Government & Civics:**
  Policy trade-offs, democratic deliberation, public reasoning, ethics in leadership
- **English Language Arts:**
  Argument writing, reflective writing, perspective-taking, discussion skills
- **Economics:**
  Resource allocation, labor markets, public spending, cost-benefit analysis
- **Environmental Studies:**
  Climate migration, sustainability, stewardship vs. development
- **Advisory / Teams & Clubs**
  Values clarification, empathy development, respectful disagreement

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