

STEP THREE: INVESTIGATE

Students research background information

In this step, students are no longer tied to the viewpoint they presented in Step Two: Define. They will now collect information about all the viewpoints presented. Ideally, students will be able to support their comments in the deliberative dialogue with the data they collect in this step.

Time needed

45 – 60 minutes

Classroom setup

Regular seating

Materials needed

- Variety of materials (the textbook, articles, PowerPoints, primary source materials, cartoons, charts, graphs, websites, lectures, videos, audio files, etc.) that support the 3 to 5 different perspectives being studied, or a related Choices curriculum unit with such materials included (see www.choices.edu/resources/individual.php) (one set per student)
- Set of 3 teacher-generated deliberation questions (see explanation under Role of the Teacher)
- Chalkboard or whiteboard
- Deliberative Dialogue Prep Worksheet (one per student)

Goal

To have students prepare for deliberative dialogue in *Step Four: Deliberate*.

Objectives

Students will, as individuals, gather data and evidence to support or critique the multiple perspectives that were identified in *Step Two: Define*.

Students will, as individuals, interpret and analyze historical and current information on the topic being studied.

ACTIVITY:**Introduction**

1. Explain to students that in this activity they will investigate the topic using a wide variety of materials. They will learn in-depth about the topic from the different perspectives identified in *Step Two: Define*.

2. Emphasize that today's work is vital because it will prepare them for the deliberative dialogue (deliberation) in the next step, *Step Four: Deliberate*.

Tasks

1. Introduce the set of 3 deliberation questions.
2. Write them on the board.
3. Hand out 3 "Deliberative Dialogue Prep Worksheets" to each student.
4. Ask the students to complete **1 worksheet for each question** on the board; if necessary, each worksheet can be filled front and back, but no more. Tell students that these worksheets will be used during the deliberative dialogue to provide quick access to their information and to prevent fumbling through books, handouts, or other materials. Completing the worksheets is critical preparation for the deliberation.

Note: *A very important part of the Deliberative Dialogue Prep is the **selection of quotes** for item #3 of the worksheet. Selecting quotes from the shared knowledge pool requires students to actively engage with the common information. Students should not only select quotes that confirm their own opinions on the topic, but also those quotes that they can use to challenge perspectives other than their own.*

Assessment

Collect and grade the "Deliberative Dialogue Prep Worksheets."

Conclusion

Randomly select a few students to share their favorite quotes with the class.

Handout (reproducible master copy)

Deliberative Dialogue Prep Worksheet (3 per student)

Role of the Teacher

It is important for the teacher to provide plenty of materials that represent the different perspectives on the topic and to ensure that the students become familiar with all materials so that there is **shared knowledge**. Again, these materials may be collected by the teacher or found in a related Choices curriculum unit. Shared knowledge among the students facilitates balanced, effective, and fair deliberation. It is also vital for the teacher to guide students in interpreting and analyzing the materials provided so they understand the intricacies of each perspective and can effectively deliberate on the topic.

It is also important for the teacher to develop substantial **deliberation questions** that encompass the multiple perspectives on the topic and allow students to consider the pros and cons of each perspective. These deliberative questions (or prompts) will be the ones that the teacher uses to start the deliberative dialogue in *Step Four: Deliberate*.

Note: *In order for the **deliberation questions** to be effective, they should be complex enough to allow for answers from all the different perspectives. For example, if the topic is Climate Change, the deliberation questions might include: 1) Should there be international laws which govern pollution limits? 2) Should developed countries have stricter pollution limits than developing countries? 3) What should take priority for our country, the economy or the environment?*

Tips to Avoid Failure

One reason every student is expected to prepare for the discussion is that an effective deliberation depends on the class having a shared knowledge pool. While we will discuss why this is so in *Step Four: Deliberate*, we can say for now that we want each student to feel confident enough to participate openly and freely in the upcoming deliberative dialogue. Through experience, we recognize that students tend to clam up if they do not feel they know the material sufficiently. On the flip side, we have observed that when students (perhaps those who are well read and/or have extensive outside knowledge) bring in examples outside of the shared knowledge pool, it tends to cut out of the deliberative dialogue those students who are not as informed.

The point that **preparation is paramount** cannot be overstated. Diana Hess (2009), noted professor of curriculum and instruction at University of Wisconsin - Madison, emphasizes that “successful discussions are intricately planned, and everyone is expected to prepare,” and the reason preparation is paramount is that “students and teachers who prepare well for issues discussions tend to have greater success.” Hess cautions that “it is unwise to expect that students without exceptionally well-developed discussion skills . . . can create a good discussion without preparation” (p. 71). Reiterating the centrality of preparation are Lawrence Smith and Meg Foley, who employ the innovative, highly deliberative Harkness Method at Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, and believe that student preparation is a large part of the success of any class.

Because preparation is so fundamental, the resources the teacher selects for the students are crucial. It would be easy to say simply “select resources that will provoke discussion,” but what types of resources accomplish such a task? Smith and Foley again provide some helpful clues, arguing that teachers should gravitate toward readings that provide a variety of viewpoints and offer some tension among them, readings that provide different interpretations of the same

events or even biased accounts of events. Stated succinctly, find readings or resources, in Choices curriculum units or elsewhere, that bring out the topic's tensions and lay out its different perspectives and/or interpretations. In order to do this, some of the readings may be considered "biased," which is acceptable as long as the information is accurate, the biases illuminate the pros and cons of various perspectives, and each alternative perspective is given ample coverage.

Reference

Hess, D. E. (2009). *Controversy in the Classroom: The Democratic Power of Discussion*. New York, NY: Routledge.

3. Create a list of 5 to 12 pieces of evidence (quotes, facts, statistics, examples, etc.) from the materials that you believe inform your response. Select quotes that confirm your own opinions on the topic, as well as those quotes that you can use to challenge perspectives other than your own. Be sure to include exactly where you found each quote.

4. Write down anywhere from 2 to 4 probing questions that you might bring up in the Deliberative Dialogue discussion.