

Collecting Different Perspectives

Now that you've thought through a range of different perspectives about the global issue that we are studying in class, it's time to seek out real voices from real people who disagree with you. Engaging in conversations with those who think differently will help you to understand the issue that you are studying better. Use this handout to guide your efforts to collect viewpoints that don't align with your own. Remember to show respect in any face-to-face conversations that you have! Sustaining conversations and thinking together will help everyone to learn more.

Respecting Different Perspectives

Conversation Planning Steps

Who do you intend to speak to?

(This can be any classmate, family member or friend who you know thinks differently than you do.)

When do you plan to speak to this person?

(Do you have time to meet during the school day? Will you have to make any travel arrangements to meet with this person? Is there a due date that you must be aware of? How will you get in touch with this person?)

How do you expect this person to feel about the controversial issue that you are studying?

(Have you heard this person speak about the issue that you are studying before? Are they likely to completely disagree with your point of view? Will there be any common ground between your perspectives?)

Is there anything about this person's age and/or experiences that might shape the way that they think about the topic that you are studying?

(Are they likely to have first-hand experience with the topic that you are studying? Will their experience—or inexperience—influence their point of view? Will their age, family background, or hometown influence their point of view? How?)

What questions do you most want to ask this person? How will you challenge their thinking? What do you most want to understand?

(The best conversations are built on questions! If you want to encourage other people to talk, you've got to concentrate on asking and listening instead of talking and telling. Brainstorming good questions now will help you to sustain conversations later.)

***Note:** While speaking with an actual person will be far more meaningful, it is not required to gather different perspectives. You can also search the Internet to collect multiple viewpoints on the issues that you are studying. To explore the perspectives of other middle and high school students who are thinking about global issues like poverty, war, the environment and the economy, consider visiting <http://www.letters2president.org/>

Taking Notes During Your Conversation

What key points does this person make about the issue that you are studying?

(Are there ideas that they repeat time and again? Do they use phrases like, "What I really believe..." or "Most importantly...?")

What kinds of attitudes or emotions does this person display during your conversation?

(Do they seem open to new ideas? Are they angry? Excited? Emotional? How do they respond to challenges that you pose? Which ideas "fire them up?" Which ideas do they seem the least interested in?)

How does this person answer the questions that you ask?

(Remember that you came into this conversation hoping to understand new perspectives. Record as many details as you can.)

Reflecting On Your Conversation

What new ideas did you learn ***about the topic*** that you are studying during this conversation?

(Careful thinkers can ALWAYS learn something new from people who have different points of view. What caught your attention during this conversation? What points caught you by surprise? What hadn't you considered before?)

What new ideas did you learn ***about your opponents*** during this conversation?

(Are there specific points that they feel particularly strongly about? Are there specific points that they might be convinced to change? What kinds of language do they use?)

Are there parts of this person's point of view that resonate with you? What is impossible for you to agree with?

(Persuasion often depends on finding common ground between different points of view. Where is the overlap between your thinking and the positions of this person? What are the flaws in their thinking? How can you convince them respectfully their ideas are flawed?)