

CLOSE UP CONVERSATION SERIES #2

EXAMINING CURRENT ISSUES AND WHY PEOPLE DISAGREE



CLOSE UP[®]
WASHINGTON DC

mismatch

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INTRODUCTION TO THE CLOSE UP CONVERSATION SERIES



Welcome to the Close Up Conversation Series!

The Close Up Conversation Series is designed to help students engage in respectful civil discourse that fosters students' understanding of current issues and strengthen their critical thinking skills. By participating in this series, students will build cultural awareness and empathy through a combination of classroom work and live exchanges with diverse peers.

The series is comprised of three scheduled conversations that will take place live on the Mismatch platform between paired classrooms. The expected timeline for these three conversations is between 2-4 months.

What do the conversations look like?

#1: Building Relationships – The first conversation establishes rapport, builds trust, and helps students learn how to relate to one another. Students will explore questions around relationships, respecting differences, and resolving problems.

#2: Political Values – The second conversation centers on political values and how they influence the decision-making process. Students will learn more about how they and their peers think about political values and their importance for discussing complicated policy issues.

#3: Policy Discussion – In this final conversation, students discuss and deliberate a set of policy options to address the specific policy issue chosen in advance by the paired educators.

How can I prepare my students for each conversation?

To help educators create a more meaningful experience for their students, this packet also provides teachers with recommended in-class activities to be completed before a live conversation.¹ We strongly recommend educators use these lesson plans to help students become familiar with the topics and terminology used throughout the conversation series.

Educators can also take advantage of the following curricular materials found on Close Up's website, which can be used before, during, and after a conversation:

1. [Current Issues Blog](#): Our weekly posts frame major issues in the news and provide critical questions to spark civil discussion in the classroom. The information and questions explored in this blog can provide a ready in-class means for students to practice the discourse skills they develop through the conversation series.
2. [Controversial Issues in the News](#): This resource is most helpful for students to use before conversation #3. Exploring the different perspectives surrounding this issue through an in-class discussion or debate can help your students become more comfortable sharing their opinions and being open-minded toward the opinions of others.

¹These activities can be completed immediately before, or a week prior to, the live conversations, depending on their availability.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITY - PREPARING FOR CONVERSATION #1



Preparing for Conversation #1: Building Relationships

Central Question: How would you describe your hometown and community to a visitor?

Goal: Students will develop an inventory of their community to assist them in their first conversation.

Overview: To prepare for the first conversation, students will work together to brainstorm about their community. By creating an inventory of their community, students will be equipped to share their personal views and understandings with their Mismatch conversation partners. You should encourage students to think of the demographics of those who live in their community as well as the cultures, businesses, residences, and institutions that comprise the community.

Time: 30 Minutes

PROCEDURE

Introduction (5 Minutes)

1. Explain to students that in their first conversation, they will be describing their community to their conversation partners in order to teach and learn about each other's hometowns. To prepare, they will be creating a "community inventory" in order to consider the profile of their communities.

Main Learning Activity (20 Minutes)

2. Place students in five groups and assign each group a category:
 - a. Education;
 - b. Businesses and Jobs;
 - c. Housing and Recreation;
 - d. Parks, Green Space & Nature;
 - e. People
3. Give each group the appropriate set of questions (Attachment 1) and a large blank sheet of paper to record their responses and ideas.
4. After the inventories are completed, post the lists around the room and have students walk around to see and to add to the lists created by other groups.

Reflection (5 Minutes)

5. Bring students back together in a whole group. Pose a few of the following questions to discuss:
 - a. Why is it important to consider the positive characteristics of your community?
 - b. Was it difficult to agree on positive characteristics/needs in your small group? Why?
 - c. Was there unanimous consensus about anything added to your inventory?
 - d. What are the benefits of interacting with people from different communities?

ATTACHMENT 1 – COMMUNITY INVENTORY



Education

- Where do people go to school in your community? Are there multiple kinds of schools (public/private/religious)?
- How many schools are there?
- What clubs and extracurricular activities are available in your schools?
- Are there community colleges, universities, or technical schools for people to attend after high school?

Businesses & Jobs

- What kinds of jobs do people in your community do?
- Do most people work in your community or commute to another town/city?
- What kinds of businesses (shops/stores/services) are in your community?

Housing & Recreation

- What kinds of homes do people in your community live in?
- Do people live close together, or are they spread out?
- What do people in your community do for fun? To relax?

Outdoor Life

- How does nature/the natural world show up in your community? (A lot of trees and green space? Wild animals?)
- Are there parks, playgrounds or other community outdoor spaces in your community?
- Do people in your community spend a lot of time outdoors? What activities do they engage in?

People

- How many people live in your community? Is it rural? A small town? A big city?
- What different cultures, religions, and ethnicities are present in your community?
- Would you consider your community very diverse or more homogenous? What evidence do you have to support your answer?

IN-CLASS ACTIVITY - PREPARING FOR CONVERSATION #2



ALL LESSON INSTRUCTIONS AND MATERIALS ARE FOUND IN: [Understanding Political Values](#)

Central Question: What political values do you hold and which values are held by your community?

Goal: Students will understand that competing values and goals animate American public policy deliberations and will begin to understand why it is so difficult for the public to reach agreement on political issues. Finally, students will identify and begin to evaluate values that are frequently in tension in U.S. political debates.

Teacher Note: It is important to know that the meaning of the values listed here is contested. People debate what freedom/liberty means, for example, by arguing whether freedom is only about freedom from government coercion. Freedom also relates to freedom from coercion by private institutions. The common good is also highly contested as people argue over the role of environmental versus economic concerns and over who should be included in the vision of “common” good. Finally, it is important to know that although six values are listed here, there are a broad range of values that could also be included. For example, democracy, unity, and individualism are values that are often relevant in U.S. political debates. The six listed here are intended to be useful starting points, and also to show the ways that values can come into conflict with each other. As your students become more comfortable with this set of values, you may look to expand the list of values that you bring into classroom discussions.

Time: 50 Minutes

Materials (found in [Understanding Political Values](#)): 1 Copy of Attachments 1A and 1B per group (see step 1 of Introduce Key Values); 1 Copy of Attachment 2A for a third of the class, 2B for a third; and 2C for a third. (NOTE: If doing the homework/extension, all students need one copy of each of Attachment 2A – 2C.)

IN-CLASS ACTIVITY - PREPARING FOR CONVERSATION #3



Once paired educators agree upon the policy topic for conversation #3, they can prepare their students for the conversation using the corresponding resource below.

[Climate Change](#)

[The Opioid Crisis](#)

[Immigration](#)

[School Shootings](#)

Goal: Student will understand the underlying debates surrounding current issues and use that information to inform their final conversation

Time: 50 min

Materials: Attachment 1A, all other materials are available in the topic packet

Overview: To prepare for the final conversation, students will conduct background research on the choice topic. They will explore the most common debates surrounding the issue and use the information they read and discuss in class to inform the conversation they will have with their conversation partners.

Introduction (5 mins):

- 1) Display your topic clearly in the room and ask students to brainstorm issues they think of when that topic is brought up
- 2) Allow students to share their thoughts. Take several responses and record them clearly for students to see.

Main Activity (30-35 mins):

- 1) Distribute the topic packets and ATTACHMENT 1. Instruct students to read through the Central Question, Introduction, and Background Sections in the topic packet.
- 2) Instruct students to highlight/circle any terms or concepts they are unfamiliar with as they read. Ask student to record questions/thoughts they have about the topic on ATTACHMENT 1 and respond to the questions.
- 3) Once the students have finished reading through the first three sections of the packet hold a brief discussion and invite them to share out the unfamiliar terms and concepts that they have identified as well as any clarifying questions. You can also ask them to share their responses to the reading questions on ATTACHMENT 1.
- 4) Instruct students to continue reading the rest of the packet. Tell them they should be prepared to discuss their opinions after reading through the information and that they should answer the remaining questions on ATTACHMENT 1.

Reflection (10-15 mins)

- 1) Ask students to turn to a partner and discuss their responses on ATTACHMENT 1
- 2) Invite students to share their thoughts and opinions on the topic. Lead students through a discussion focused on stating their opinions of the topic and providing reasoning for how they arrived at their opinion.

Possible Discussion Questions:

- 1) *Were there any ideas presented in the reading that you had not considered before?*
- 2) *Has your opinion on this topic changed after reading any of this information?*
- 3) *Do you believe your opinion on this topic aligns with that of your community or do you feel you probably hold a different opinion than most?*
- 4) *After having two conversations with your Mismatch partners do you believe they are more or less likely to share your opinion? Why?*



Name: _____ Date: _____

Topic: _____

Preparing for Conversation #3 - Topic Discussion

Directions: Answer the questions in Part 1 below as you read through the Background Section of the packet.

Part 1 - Background Information

1. What information did you know about this topic before reading this packet?

2. How do you believe the issues raised in this topic impact your family or community?

3. How do you believe these issues impact the nation as a whole?

4. How do you anticipate your Mismatch partners will view this topic?



Part 2 - Background Information

1. What do you believe is most important about this topic?

2. What are two arguments you read about in this packet that you agree with?

3. Did anything in this article change your opinion on these issues? If not, why has your opinion remained the same?



Central Question: How, if at all, has your perspective changed as a result of your Close Up Conversation Series?

Goal: Students will reflect on their experiences and analyze the impact that civil dialogue can have on their views and values.

Overview: To reflect on the final conversation, students will recall the community and cultural characteristics of their Mismatch partners. Students will then consider how those characteristics intersect with their own idea of an American identity.

Time: 30 Minutes

PROCEDURE

Introduction (5 Minutes)

1. Explain to students that we will reflect on the entire Close Up Conversation Series. Remind students that in their final conversation, they discussed American culture, values that Americans, and the United States may agree or disagree on, and how the media, news, music, etc. may impact or influence their own opinions.
2. Give a few minutes to share out what they enjoyed and/or gained from their conversation.

Main Learning Activity (15 Minutes)

1. After a few minutes, place students in small groups of 4-5. Ask students to recall how similar or different their communities and cultures were from their conversation partners. Following a short discussion, instruct students to write down the words/phrases their partners used to describe their own cultures and community.
2. Bring students back to whole group and have each group share out 3-5 words/phrases they discussed. Record any reoccurring words, phrases and themes in the blank partner state outline.
3. Have students return to their small groups and revisit the following questions they discussed with their conversation partners:
 - b. How would you describe an “American” culture?
 - b. Are there any values that you think Americans agree on? If yes, what are those values? If not, what values do you think Americans disagreed on?
4. Based on the answers to those questions, have small groups brainstorm the words they would use to describe the United States (even if they are already on the state flipchart, whiteboard, etc.)
5. During the student discussion, bring up a flipchart or whiteboard outline of United States.
6. Repeat **step 2**, bolding/underlining words that students had said in the previous conversation and repeated this time around.

Reflection (10 Minutes)

1. Have students reflect on a few of the following questions:
 - a. How is your community and your partners' community similar? How are they different?
 - b. What are some reasons why they would be similar and/or different?
 - c. How has this activity deepened your understanding about what it means to be an "American"?
 - d. Thinking back to all three of the conversations you had with your conversation partners, was it important or useful for you to discuss your beliefs, opinions, and identities with people who are different than you?
 - i. If yes, why?
 - ii. If not, how could it become more important or useful?
2. Thank them for their time and engagement with their conversation partners and these conversations throughout the last few weeks.