

Lesson Plan: Choices, Choices

Considering the Pros and Cons of Peer Pressure

Grades

6-12

Subjects

Civics, Fine Arts, Language Arts, Sociology

Overview

In this lesson, students will consider the impact of peer pressure on adolescent life, and will then debate its pros and cons.

Materials Needed

- *This Is Where I Need To Be* – Chapters 3, 10, 12, and 18 connect most strongly to this lesson, as does Quainat Zaman's personal reflection. Other related chapters are 14 and 22.
- Jar of beans (jelly beans, coffee beans, lentils, or any other kind you choose)

Activities/Procedures

1. WARM-UP/CONVERSATION STARTERS:

Place a large number of beans in a glass jar. Ask students to guess the number of beans in the jar and to anonymously write down their answers on a scrap of paper. Collect their responses. Then, divide the class into three groups and ask each group to guess the number of beans in the jar. Provide each group with a sheet of paper to write their response:

- For Group 1: Provide some high estimates for them to consider
- For Group 2: Provide some low estimates for them to consider
- For Group 3: Provide no estimates for them to consider

Collect each group's response, and then tell them the correct answer. Ask students to consider how their guesses were affected by the estimates they were provided (or not). The results of this experiment should show that students were more likely to guess numbers in a certain range depending upon the estimate provided to their group.

Share with students the range of guesses that they individually came up with at the start of the activity (it should be quite wide). Ask the class: Did the group discussion sway your opinion one way or another? Why do you think so many of you came up with such a range of different answers when I originally asked you to just look at the jar and write down a number by yourselves?

Share with students that a similar experiment was originally conducted back in 1932 by psychologist Arthur Jenness who found that when the number of beans was estimated by people on their own there was quite a wide range of numbers given. However, when groups were given an estimate, the range of numbers grew narrower.

Ask: Why do you think that is?

Share a definition of peer pressure with students. Then ask: In what other areas of your life do you feel influenced by your peers' opinions or actions in both helpful and harmful ways? Make a list of responses on the board in two columns: "pros" and "cons."

Wrap-up the activity by telling students that they are going to be reading and discussing oral histories that explore the impact of peer pressure on the experiences and self-esteem of young Muslim Americans.

2. QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION:

As a class, read and discuss the related chapters of *This Is Where I Need To Be*, focusing on the following:

- a. What types of peer pressure and temptations do the writers of "*This Is Where I Need To Be*" face? Make a list.
- b. Identify or highlight a passage that captures the conflict faced by one of the authors.
- c. How do these authors deal with the peer pressure in their lives? To what do they turn for strength or support?
- d. Did you come across any examples where peer pressure was a positive force in the lives of these authors? If yes, what and how?
- e. Were you able to identify with the experiences shared by these oral histories? Why or why not?

3. CLASS PROJECT:

Ask students to research the Five Pillars of Islamic faith as well as some of Islam's cultural norms (e.g.: no dating, no alcohol). Keeping these in mind, prompt students to write "Dear Abby" style letters about possible peer pressure dilemmas that young Muslim Americans might encounter. They might also wish to write from the point of view of one of the authors in *This Is Where I Need To Be*.

Put all of the letters into a hat and have each student pick one letter. Tell students that they will play the role of an advice columnist and will write a response to the letter they've chosen, offering counsel and tips on how to deal with the given situation in school or their community. They might also focus on how to turn a difficult situation into a positive one. Invite students to find examples of positive, hip, and cool role models to cite as proof that it is possible to follow one's path of individuality.

Wrap up by having students reflect on how this activity allowed them to "walk in another's shoes," so to speak, or helped them come up with solutions to peer pressure that make sense in their own lives. You may also want to open up the discussion to the question of how their faith impacts their own choices.

4. HOMEWORK OR LONGER-TERM ASSIGNMENTS:

- a. Have students read Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" and pick an oral history from *This is Where I Need To Be*. Ask students to write a journal entry from the perspective of the oral history's author about a situation in his or her life where a lifestyle or decision went against the grain. What might this person have experienced? What gave him or her strength during this time? Was it worthwhile or not? Students may find it

helpful to conduct some research to better understand the author's particular situation.

- b. Ask students to write and perform a play on the theme of peer pressure where the main character struggles with a moral or ethical dilemma. They may choose to use one of the oral histories in *This Is Where I Need To Be* as inspiration for their play.
- c. Ask students to select and read a novel that explores themes of peer pressure and individuality. A good list of young adult novels is available at <http://www.librarything.com/tag/peer+pressure>. Then have students write book reviews and post the reviews in the school library or publish them on a blog.
- d. Invite students to write essays about a time in their lives when they took "the road less traveled." Host a "memoir café" in your classroom where students share their essays.
- e. Have students write modern fables (modeled after Aesop) in which the main character learns a lesson about dealing with peer pressure. Compile and publish these in a class publication.

Related Resources

The following websites and organizations can provide additional background information and lesson ideas.

Peer Pressure

An article in *The Guardian* about Solomon Asch's famous peer pressure experiment in the 1950s.

<http://tinyurl.com/6dt4ta>

eMints

Classroom resources on peer pressure from eMints National Center.

<http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00000458.shtml>

"Peer Pressure Marketing," by Thessaly La Force

Article about Youth Radio poll which found that peer pressure is the most effective form of marketing.

<http://tinyurl.com/5famta>

"The ABCs of Conflict Resolution"

This useful lesson plan from "Teaching Tolerance" looks at the way in-group favoritism hurts instead of heals conflicts.

<http://tinyurl.com/5oxu7p>

Does My Head Look Big in This, by Randa Abdel-Fattah

In this novel (Scholastic, 2008), 16-year-old Amal makes the decision to start wearing the hijab and must deal with peer pressure from strangers and her community.

<http://www.amazon.com/Does-Head-Look-Big-This/dp/043992233X/>

I Believe In...Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Young People Speak About Their Faith, by Pearl Fuyo Gaskins

This collection (Cricket Books, 2004) features interviews with and profiles of 15- to 24-year-olds on the personal meaning of their faiths.

<http://www.amazon.com/Believe-Christian-Jewish-Muslim-People/dp/081262713X/>

Dear Author: Letters of Hope, edited by Joan Kaywell

In this 2007 compilation of letters (Philomel, 2007), teen writers write to and receive replies from top young adult authors about the toughest issues they face, including peer pressure, bullying, and ostracism.

<http://www.amazon.com/Dear-Author-Letters-Hope-Top-Toughest/dp/0399237054>

Assessment

Teacher evaluation of classroom participation. Teachers may wish to develop additional rubrics and measures for class projects and longer-term assignments.

National Standards

These academic standards are drawn from the *Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning's "Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education: 3rd and 4th Editions."*

Grades 6-12

- Behavioral Studies Standard 1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior.
- Behavioral Studies Standard 2: Understands various meanings of social group, general implications of group membership, and different ways that groups function.
- Language Arts Standard 1: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
- Language Arts Standard 7: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of informational texts.
- Language Arts Standard 8: Demonstrates competence in speaking and listening as tools for learning.

Key Terms

identity, temptations, Muslim youth, Five Pillars, conflict resolution, group behavior, peer pressure