

---

# In the Other Person's Shoes

## A Discussion Technique

---

This lesson plan is designed for use with (or without!) the video *Undivide Us*.

Video Length: 45:25

### **Lesson Description:**

What if we could learn to understand each other's perspectives better, even on divisive issues? This lesson introduces "In the Other Person's Shoes," a powerful discussion technique that encourages students to step into someone else's viewpoint, fostering empathy and respect. By engaging in respectful dialogue about controversial topics, students will learn to appreciate differing opinions and develop skills to discuss complex issues without resorting to personal attacks. This method helps participants not only voice their own opinions but also explore and understand why others may think differently, promoting a culture of constructive disagreement and mutual respect.

### **Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

- identify the rules and procedures of the "In the Other Person's Shoes" discussion technique.
- compare their own viewpoints with those of others by accurately describing why someone might hold an opposing opinion on a controversial topic.
- defend the use of the "In the Other Person's Shoes" technique as an effective method for promoting empathy and respectful dialogue in discussions.

### **Concepts & Key Terms:**

**Empathy:** The ability to understand and share the feelings of another person by imagining yourself in that person's situation, which helps you to connect with and care about how that person feels.

**Toxic polarization:** When people in a society become so deeply divided by their beliefs and opinions that they see those who disagree with them as enemies, making it hard to have respectful conversations or work together to solve problems.

### **Materials Needed:**

- Three differently colored squares of construction paper for each participant (e.g., purple, yellow, orange)
- A list of controversial topics with two opposing viewpoints and corresponding color assignments (examples follow in this plan)
- A group of diverse-thinking participants
- A moderator (typically the teacher) who remains neutral
- Optional: Venn Diagram worksheet (included) for each participant

### **Process:**

#### **1. Introduction** (10 minutes):

Begin with a brief overview of the lesson's purpose: promoting empathy and respectful discussion.

Pose thought-provoking questions to students, such as "Why is it important to understand someone else's viewpoint?" or "How can empathy lead to better conversations?"

2. **Guidelines and Rules** (5 minutes):

Explain the basic rules: Discussions are not personal, no name-calling, no demonizing others, and no raising voices. Emphasize the importance of respect and presuming that others are reasonable people with their own valid perspectives.

3. **Practice Round** (5 minutes):

Choose a non-controversial topic (e.g., preference for dogs vs. cats).

Instruct students to use the colored squares to indicate their preference (e.g. yellow for dogs, purple for cats, orange for both/neither) when the moderator says, "1, 2, 3, reveal!"

Have one specific student (dog student) explain why he or she thinks another specific student (cat student) chose the opposite preference. Then have the cat student acknowledge what the dog person got right and say what else about cats should be considered.

4. **Main Activity: Controversial Topic Discussion** (20 minutes):

Introduce a controversial topic with two opposing viewpoints.

Follow the same procedure: "1, 2, 3, reveal!" using the colored squares.

Ask one participant to explain why he or she believes another participant chose the opposing viewpoint. Participants should be specific in choosing individuals, rather than simply stating their viewpoint, because the point is to humanize the viewpoint.)

Invite the other participant to respond with what was accurate and what else should be considered.

Encourage other students to join the discussion, adding their perspectives.

5. **Conclusion and Reflection** (10 minutes):

Facilitate a discussion on what students learned about themselves and others through this exercise.

Ask reflective questions such as "How did it feel to articulate someone else's viewpoint?" and "What challenges did you encounter?"

6. **Assessment:**

Evaluate students based on their participation, ability to articulate another's perspective, and the respect shown during discussions.

7. **Optional:**

Assign a short reflective essay on the importance of empathy in discussions.

8. **Optional:**

Have students complete the viewpoint Venn Diagram worksheet in class or for homework.

## **List of Sample Controversial Topics with Opposing Viewpoints:**

We acknowledge that there are often multiple viewpoints on controversial topics. This list is merely provided as a starting point.

### **Social Media's Impact on Society**

Viewpoint 1: Social media has a positive impact by connecting people and spreading information quickly.

Viewpoint 2: Social media has a negative impact by spreading misinformation and causing mental health issues.

### **School Uniforms**

Viewpoint 1: School uniforms promote equality and reduce distractions in the classroom.

Viewpoint 2: School uniforms limit students' freedom of expression and individuality.

### **Cell Phones in School**

Viewpoint 1: Cell phones should be allowed in school as they are useful for learning and emergencies.

Viewpoint 2: Cell phones should be banned in school because they are a distraction and can be used for cheating.

### **Homework**

Viewpoint 1: Homework is essential for reinforcing learning and building discipline.

Viewpoint 2: Homework is unnecessary and creates stress, taking away from family and free time.

### **Standardized Testing**

Viewpoint 1: Standardized tests are a fair way to measure students' knowledge and abilities.

Viewpoint 2: Standardized tests are biased and don't accurately reflect a student's potential or understanding.

### **Climate Change Action**

Viewpoint 1: Immediate and strong action is needed to combat climate change and protect the environment.

Viewpoint 2: Climate change concerns are exaggerated, and economic stability should be prioritized over environmental regulations.

### **Animal Testing**

Viewpoint 1: Animal testing is necessary for scientific and medical advancements.

Viewpoint 2: Animal testing is unethical and should be banned because it causes unnecessary suffering.

## **Free College Education**

Viewpoint 1: College education should be free to ensure everyone has equal access to opportunities.

Viewpoint 2: Free college education is too expensive and should not be funded by taxpayers.

## **Legal Drinking Age**

Viewpoint 1: The legal drinking age should remain at 21 to protect young people from the dangers of alcohol.

Viewpoint 2: The legal drinking age should be lowered to 18, corresponding to other adult activities such as voting and joining the military.

## **The Death Penalty**

Viewpoint 1: The death penalty is a necessary deterrent to serious crimes and provides justice for victims.

Viewpoint 2: The death penalty is inhumane, and there is a risk of executing innocent people.

## **Gun Control**

Viewpoint 1: Stricter gun control laws are needed to reduce violence and increase public safety.

Viewpoint 2: Gun control laws infringe on personal freedoms and the right to self-defense.

## **Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)**

Viewpoint 1: GMOs are safe and necessary to increase food production and fight hunger.

Viewpoint 2: GMOs are unnatural and could have unknown health and environmental impacts.

## **Social Media Influencers' Impact**

Viewpoint 1: Social media influencers have a positive impact by promoting awareness and inspiring positive change.

Viewpoint 2: Social media influencers often spread unrealistic standards and misinformation, leading to negative impacts.

## **Mandatory Vaccinations**

Viewpoint 1: Vaccinations should be mandatory to protect public health and prevent disease outbreaks.

Viewpoint 2: People should have the right to choose whether to vaccinate, respecting personal freedom and bodily autonomy.

## **School Start Times**

Viewpoint 1: Schools should start later in the morning to allow students more sleep and improve academic performance.

Viewpoint 2: School start times should remain as they are to fit parents' work schedules and maintain routine.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## **In the Other Person's Shoes** **Viewpoint Venn Diagram**

**Directions:** Complete the three boxes below. In **My Viewpoint**, write key points of your viewpoint on the given topic. In **Opposing Viewpoint**, write key points of the opposing viewpoint as understood from the discussion. In **Common Ground**, note shared beliefs between the two viewpoints.

**My Viewpoint**

**Common Ground**

**Opposing Viewpoint**

--	--	--

What surprised you about the common ground you found? \_\_\_\_\_

Why is it important to try to understand other people's perspectives without demonizing them? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---