

University of Virginia Center for Politics



**Democracy Corps Lesson Plan 14:
Interact with Political Leaders of Opposing Viewpoints**

Purpose:

This lesson is a part of YLI's Democracy Corps service learning program. Students interact with government leaders who have a different perspective on their target issue. Emphasis is placed on understanding opposing viewpoints and explaining how this information can lead to solutions.

Materials:

- Children's Literature Book: *Seven Blind Mice by Ed Young*
- Student Guide 1: *Interact with Political Leaders of Opposing Viewpoints*

Central Questions:

What does the term "perspective" mean?
What role does perspective play in political issues?
Why is it important to understand many sides of an issue?
How do I learn more about views that differ from mine?

Procedure:

1. Warm Up : Read *Seven Blind Mice* by Ed Young and discuss. Ask the students what they think the term "perspective" means and how it impacts political decisions.
2. Distribute Student Guide 1: *Interact with Political Leaders of Opposing Viewpoints* and ask students to complete Steps 1-5 in class. It will be helpful for students to have access to the internet when completing Step 5 of the student guide.
3. Review the interview guidelines in Step 6 and then provide students with deadlines for the completion of the project.

Differentiation:

If an interview is difficult for students based on skills or logistical complications, then they may write a letter to a political leader instead. This will not provide immediate dialogue or lively discussion, but it will serve the purpose of introducing students to opposing viewpoints if they select the expert carefully.



Interact with Political Leaders of Opposing Viewpoints

“Knowing in part may make a fine tale, but wisdom comes from seeing the whole.”

—Ed Young, Author

Step One: Define the term perspective and explain how it relates to political decisions.

Step Two: Explain your perspective as it relates to your target issue.

- What needs aren't being met from your point of view?

- What is your experience with the issue?

- Why is the issue important to you?

- How does your age, gender and geography impact your perspective on this issue?

Rank the priority of your issue as it relates to other needs in your community.

(Scale is 1-10 with 1 being the lowest priority and 10 the highest.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Step Three: Interview three students in your class.

During each of the interviews, describe your target issue and ask each peer to explain his/her perspective and rank its priority using the same scale used in Step 2.

Perspective	Ranking (Circle 1-10)
Peer #1 _____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Peer #2 _____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Peer #3 _____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Step Four: Analyze the data from interviews with your peers.

- What did you notice about the perspective of people in your class?

- Did everyone have the same opinion? Why or why not?

Step Five: Identify political leaders or other experts in the community who might have a different perspective than you on your target issue.

Name and contact information for a political leader with an opposing viewpoint on your target issue.

Political Leader _____ **Phone** _____

E-mail Address _____

Step Six: Schedule an interview with a political leader or a community expert who does not share your views on your target issue.

Scheduling the event

- Call or write the community member you'd like to interview to schedule a time that is convenient for you both. (Maximum flexibility will help when scheduling.)
- Explain the purpose of the interview and how you will use the information discussed.
Sample: "I am interested in broadening my understanding of (insert your target issue) and I'd like to get your perspective on this community problem."
- Prepare constructive questions that will fill gaps in your knowledge and build understanding.
Sample: "I understand you voted to cut funding for services like ____ and _____. Can you explain why this is no longer a funding priority?"

Guidelines for the Interview

- Be on time.
- Be appreciative of the individual's time.
- Be respectful of his/her expertise and differing views.
- Ask questions to clarify information that is confusing.

Step Seven: Reflect on the information gathered during the interview as you answer the following questions.

- What new information did you learn from the interview?

- Based on information from the interview, are there areas where consensus could be built in order to improve the community?
