

FUN, GAMES, & OTHER LEARNING

NEW COLORS AND CHEERS

START
HERE

Students have a great deal of experience making common ground with colleagues in class or with teammates in sports, but what do they have in common with all the students at their school?

Ask students to brainstorm a list of what they share in common with the other students at their school. Spirit? Pride? A winning sports tradition? Reputation for academic excellence? Service to the community?

What symbolizes their common ground? The school colors, mascot, and cheer? Have students research the history of the school and find out who chose the colors, designed the mascot, and wrote the cheer. What common values or aspirations were they supposed to express?

Research the demographics of the student body at the time of the school's founding or when the colors, mascot, and cheer were adopted. How have students changed over the years?

Challenge students to design a new mascot, choose new colors, and write a new cheer (or school song) that expresses the common values of the school and the aspirations of the students, faculty, and community. They should give full rein to their imaginations, but remember that the exercise is to express something that is held in common, not a vision or goal of one individual or of a small group.

When you have a new mascot, song, and color scheme, ask the class what it would take to make these new symbols official. How would students and the faculty, administration, coaches, and community react? Whose approval would be necessary? Who would resist? How would the students find support? Once students raise the issue, there will be division. How will they work to create common ground?

Is there room for compromise? Change colors and keep the mascot? Change the mascot and keep the cheer? Or do these reflect two different sets of values and aspirations?

Note: As in San Jose, Calif., where the city opened up the debate over a statue, discussion over a community's symbols can be explosive. News of this exercise will spread in the student body and may lead to controversy.

MAKING TOUGH DECISIONS



START
HERE

There are times when we cannot find common ground but we need a resolution. We go to court: Juries must either find common ground or void the process of the trial. We put the issue on a ballot: Voting is a tie-breaker. Americans have developed a whole system of dispute resolution.

Ask the class to brainstorm the ways that issues are settled when parties can't agree, then ask them to play this game.

Break the class into groups of six. In each group, two students are on team A, two are on team B, and two are mediators. Team A and team B take opposite sides of a debate.

The issue can be historical. For instance, since the United States never delivered on its promise to give the emancipated slaves 40 acres and a mule, the government owes reparations to the slaves' descendants.

Or the issue can involve current affairs. For example, excessive government regulation has driven American businesses overseas and has caused the current fall in the quality of life.

Have the teams debate for 20 minutes. Can they reach common ground? If they can't, the mediators have 10 minutes to propose a way to resolve the issue using the information and arguments brought to the table by the two teams. A simple majority vote? A compromise? A third alternative?

After a resolution has been proposed, have the groups report to the whole class. What lessons did they learn about "forced" common ground? What are the benefits? What are the weaknesses?

COMMON GROUND