

QUICK

S T A R T S

Ask your students what choice means to them. Here are some exercises to stimulate exploration of this theme.



Making a choice can be difficult. Ask your class to choose one, and only one, thing to get through the day with. Examples might include: school books, backpack, lunch, beeper, homework, paper and pens, gym clothes, locker key.

Discuss students' rationale for the choice they make. What criteria is important to them? How will they deal with the situations that arise when they don't have something they need? What are the consequences of living with the choices you make?



Engage the class in some "what if" exercises.

For instance, what if you catch your best friend cheating on a test? Do you rat on him or her to the teacher? What if you see a friend stealing someone's calculator? Do you tell the victim? What if you choose a better player for an intramural team over your best friend? Can you justify your choice and still keep your friend? How do emotions factor into the choices we make? Discuss the risk factors involved in decision making and what happens when your choice causes unhappiness for someone else.



Role-play a situation where student apathy rules.

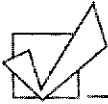
For example, it's common knowledge that a fellow student regularly carries contraband in his or her backpack, but everyone ignores the situation. What's the harm? Is anyone responsible or liable besides the offender? Who's to blame if the item is a weapon or a chemical that ends up harming you or someone you know? Is simply doing nothing considered a choice?



Post "new" rules for use of the playground—claiming that overcrowding is a concern. The rules should allocate, arbitrarily, areas that can be used by certain students. For example, only girls can use the open field areas, and only boys can use playground equipment areas. Declare the system "separate but equal" and discuss the fairness and feasibility of the plan. What would be a better allocation? How should that be determined?



Ask the class to role-play this situation: The school district has had a sudden windfall and is distributing the extra funding directly to classes. Every class will get \$200 to spend at their discretion to advance study in a particular subject. (Translation: It's not for pizza.) Ask students to suggest ways to spend the money. Collect ideas. Then ask students to pare down the list to their three or four top choices. How will they do that? Vote? After they've narrowed down their list, ask them to reach a consensus on what to do with the money. It's a long, tough road. Bonus: If students come up with a great idea, can you get together and figure out how to raise \$200?



Ask the class to choose a controversial issue in the community or in the news. It might be the siting of a homeless shelter, drug sweeps in public housing, condom distribution in school, sending troops to Bosnia, or settling the federal budget debate. Create a balance sheet of what was at stake, who won, who lost, and how the issue was settled. Option: Set up a debate. Give each side five minutes to convince the other side to join their way of thinking. Use this model to bring the controversies of the past to life. Choose a hard choice that you're studying; for instance, entering World War I, World War II, or the Vietnam War; desegregation; suffrage; Reconstruction. Create a balance sheet. Ask students to role-play a debate arguing the pros and cons.



Don't ask your students to see merely both sides of the issue concerning the reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone National Park. Instead, ask students to see how many different points of view they can come up with. How many different points of view can they devise on Chelsea? How many on Eagle Pass?

*"Cautious, careful people,
always casting about to preserve
their reputations, . . . can never
effect a reform."*

—Susan B. Anthony