

TAKING SIDES

LEVEL: middle school
SUBJECT: social studies
TIME: one class period



"A DOG'S TALE"

Read the class this story, then divide students into small discussion groups.

You and your family move into a new neighborhood. Within weeks of your arrival, several of your neighbor's cats are found dead. People in the neighborhood accuse your dog of committing the dastardly deeds. You believe that your dog is innocent. But your dog has been roaming free, and several neighbors testify that they've seen your pooch in the area, about the same time as the feline soon-to-be victims. There have been reports of dogs bothering people in the area. Recently, several small children have been bitten by dogs.

Those concerned present their complaints to the city council. At their next meeting, council members pass a resolution that states that all dogs must be collected and that the city will put the animals to sleep. No one will be allowed to own a dog in your neighborhood again.

Is the council's decision fair? What would your students do in this situation? Do they think any of the council members own dogs? Who speaks for the pet owners? What other explanation is there for the dead cats if the dogs aren't to blame? What about the dog bites suffered by some of the neighborhood children? What are the alternatives for solving this problem, and who should be involved in this decision? Ask each group to reach a consensus on a fair solution to the problem.

THE NEXT STEP

Role-play the council meeting. Have students play the parts of the accused dog's owner, council members, and neighbors in attendance. Who should make the final decision?

Look at other controversial decisions in your community that affect your students—such as skateboard bans or curfews—and have the class debate the pros and cons.

Karen Tryda
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LEVEL: middle school
SUBJECTS: social studies and language arts
TIME: one class period for discussion; one-half period for chapter treatments.



REBELLION BY THE BOOK

Assign or read aloud *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. Tell the class to take notes on these specific issues:

- World of Sameness
- Personal freedom
- Diversity
- Personal responsibility
- Participation
- Concept of family
- Work assignments
- Clothing/hairstyle norms
- The Receiver of Memory
- "For the good of the community"
- Unproductive behavior
- Jonas' decision

The Giver is rich with issues for discussion on responsibility, freedom, and decision making. Ask your class to evaluate the World of Sameness. Have students give their opinions on conformity and the lack of freedom in such a structured existence. Explore how this phenomenon came to be, and ask students to compare it to their situation. What decisions could change the way of life for people in the Land of Sameness? Ask students to imagine themselves in Jonas' position. What decision would they make in his place? What price would they pay?

This book is an excellent jumping-off place for discussing a wide range of social and historical issues.

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LEVELS: middle school and high school
SUBJECT: economics
TIME: two to three class periods



DEER VS. HUMANS

Some of the most hotly debated issues of the last decade have involved the use of land by people and animals all trying to share the same habitat. In Montana and Idaho, it's the conflict between ranchers and the newly reintroduced gray wolf. In the old-growth forest of the Northwest, it's the conflict between the timber industry and the spotted owl. Sometimes the decision to put aside habitat and protect animals creates new problems. In areas of the Northeast, deer populations have been growing rapidly, invading suburban and urban areas, and causing serious problems.

In this exercise, students will look at the following conflict, weigh alternatives, and propose a solution.

Divide your class into small groups of four to five students. Circulate the handout (right). You may choose to conduct this exercise in class or assign it as homework.

After students complete their report, have them present their findings to the rest of the class.

Conclude this exercise by asking students to discuss all the proposals and then reach a consensus on the best approach. (Alternatively, you might organize a more formal debate, with teams arguing for their proposal and against the other groups' proposals.)

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EXPANDING WILDLIFE POPULATION

Because of a number of factors, the local deer population has experienced rapid and unchecked expansion. Deer have since been observed in new areas. Their appearance has posed some problems. Some deer have been grazing in urban areas on shrubs, small trees, and lawns—destroying some of the few green places in the city. There have also been a number of automobile collisions involving deer on the streets and highways. These accidents have caused injury to humans, damage to cars, and the death of some deer. If left unresolved, this problem will grow more severe.

Your group's task is to devise a workable strategy to resolve this problem. Prepare a short (one- to two-page) report on your proposed resolution.

Be sure to include:

- a clear description of specific steps to resolve the overpopulation problem
- the costs of each step
- arguments to support your plan and to counter potential opposition.