

QUICK

S T A R T S

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



Set up a “leverage bank” where students can choose one currency for power: money, guns, computers, books, laws, organizations, beepers, cell phones. Which currency connotes the most power? Ask students to match up problems with the currency that they think most appropriate to solve each problem.



Create a Top-10 Leverage List. Ask students to brainstorm who they think are the 10 most powerful people in America. After making their selections, ask students which criteria they used to determine who should be on the list. Next, create a second list for which money is eliminated as a criterion. Who’s on this list? What other ways are there to become powerful besides amassing wealth? Now, make a list of the 10 most powerful people in the history of our nation. Are the criteria for this list different?



Announce to the class that all funding for extra-curricular activities has been terminated. The school administration has done all that they can, but they say the situation is hopeless. Break up into small groups and challenge each group to come up with three things that they would do to change this situation. Emphasize that time is critical. Have each group present their solutions and discuss how to implement them. Are the short-term solutions different from long-term ones?



Explain the barter system (the wampum belt) to your students and break the class into pairs. Ask each pair to create their own rubric for trade that eliminates money. What would be a fair exchange for your lunch? Your new backpack? Your beeper? Who sets the standard? How would you decide what’s fair for both of you? What happens, over time, if the benefits are unequal?



Divide the class into four groups and conduct a poll. Ask each group to make a wish list of three things that they would like to have in the school. (For example, more computers, online capability, more gym facilities, better cafeteria food, more after-school programs.) Ask each group to settle on one issue and draw up a business plan to make it happen. Where would they start? What are the most important things to do to accomplish their goals? Which plan seems the most practical and effective? Why? Have students debate the plans and vote for the one they think most likely to get results.



GET A PIECE OF THE ROCK

Sometimes, leverage is about controlling or setting the agenda. Run a class meeting with a “talking rock.” Explain to the class that you’re conducting a meeting, but the power to talk lies with whomever is holding the rock. What rules should you implement to pass the rock around—and still be fair? Agree on a set of rules, start the meeting, and watch democracy “rock.”

LEVERAGE

“Next to knowing when to seize an opportunity, the most important thing in life is to know when to forego an advantage.”

—Benjamin Disraeli