

*Adapted from University of Connecticut Activity: Discussing Dialoguing. Created by Emily Napear and Mindy Fan (2018)*

### Productive Political Discourse in the Classroom

Students are seated in a circle and take turns with opening question.

Opening the Discussion: **Share a highlight and low point of your week.**

Remind students to practice active listening and not to simply think about their response when another student is speaking. It may be helpful to utilize a talking stick or other visual aid to let students know where their attention should be focused.

Ask: **Have you ever heard of the word discourse? What does it mean?**

Have 2-3 students share. Then explain to students that discourse is a verbal exchange of ideas and political discourse is conversation or speech (discourse) related to politics.

Remind students what productive dialogue is and how it allows for appreciation of new perspectives, reflection on personal views, and developing mutual understanding. (It may help to have this posted to classroom.)

- no hierarchy
- everyone can communicate directly to one another
- all participants can be heard
- speak openly, and listen respectfully and attentively
- respectful contributions only -- derogatory attributions, attacks, and defensiveness have no role in dialogue
- no assumptions about the motives or character of others
- questions are sincere, and motivated by curiosity

Ask: **What is going on locally, nationally, or internationally that is at all related to your lives?**

Remind students that whatever is said in the class will stay in the classroom and if at any time someone feels upset, they can step out.

As the discussion starts, encourage students to share anything that comes to their mind with the class.

Ask: **Who has come across conversations like the ones we just had before on campus?**

Have students raise their hand if they have and have 1-2 students to share.

Ask: **Where do you see these conversations happening?**

Have 2-3 students share.

Ask: **Do you feel comfortable participating in these conversations?**

If people have not seen or heard these conversations happening, ask them why they think people around them aren't talking about it and if they should be?

**Think, Pair Share:**

*Students will think about answers to proposed questions for 30 seconds then talk to a partner about them.*

**Ask: Have you ever had a conversation with someone you don't agree with? How do you feel in these situations?**

Ask students to share out what they talked about during pair work.

Pass out hand-outs (page 4-5 of this document).

**Say: Silently think to yourself and reflect on the different ideas that are presented in the hand out.**

In groups of about 4 people, have students discuss their answers to these questions.

Afterwards, share out final thoughts and ideas as a class.

**Closing Activity/Exit Ticket:**

**Say: On an index card or scrap of paper: Consider your personal life, is it important to have productive political discourse? If so, when?**

Have all of the students crumple their paper and throw it into the center. Have everyone pick a new piece of paper and go around so that everyone will share someone else's answer.

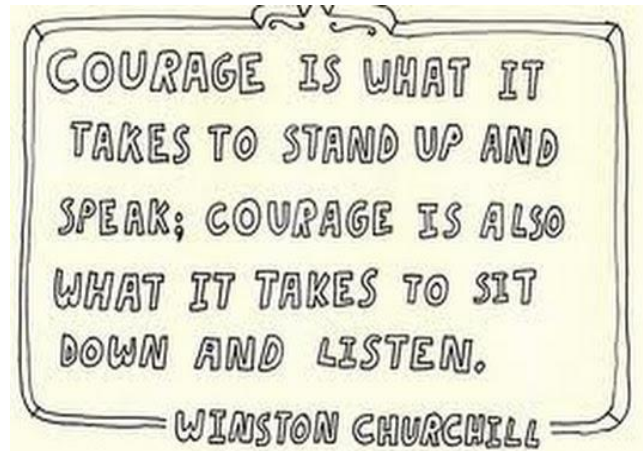
Ask for any final questions or thoughts after everyone has read.

Consider the following quotes/graphics. After reading through, think about the questions at the end and jot down some thoughts. Be ready to share your thoughts.

Is political discourse still just shouting opinions about subjective, hot-button issues based on poor understanding and outright ignorance about which agreements can never be reached?

Jeffrey Rowland

[WWW.STOREMYPIC.COM](http://WWW.STOREMYPIC.COM)



There really is confusion out there. Finding common ground sounds good. But the reality is, a lot of people on all sides have a stake in the fight.

Charles Haynes

**GO TO FIND COMMON GROUND; WHERE YOU CAN'T, YOU STAND YOUR GROUND**

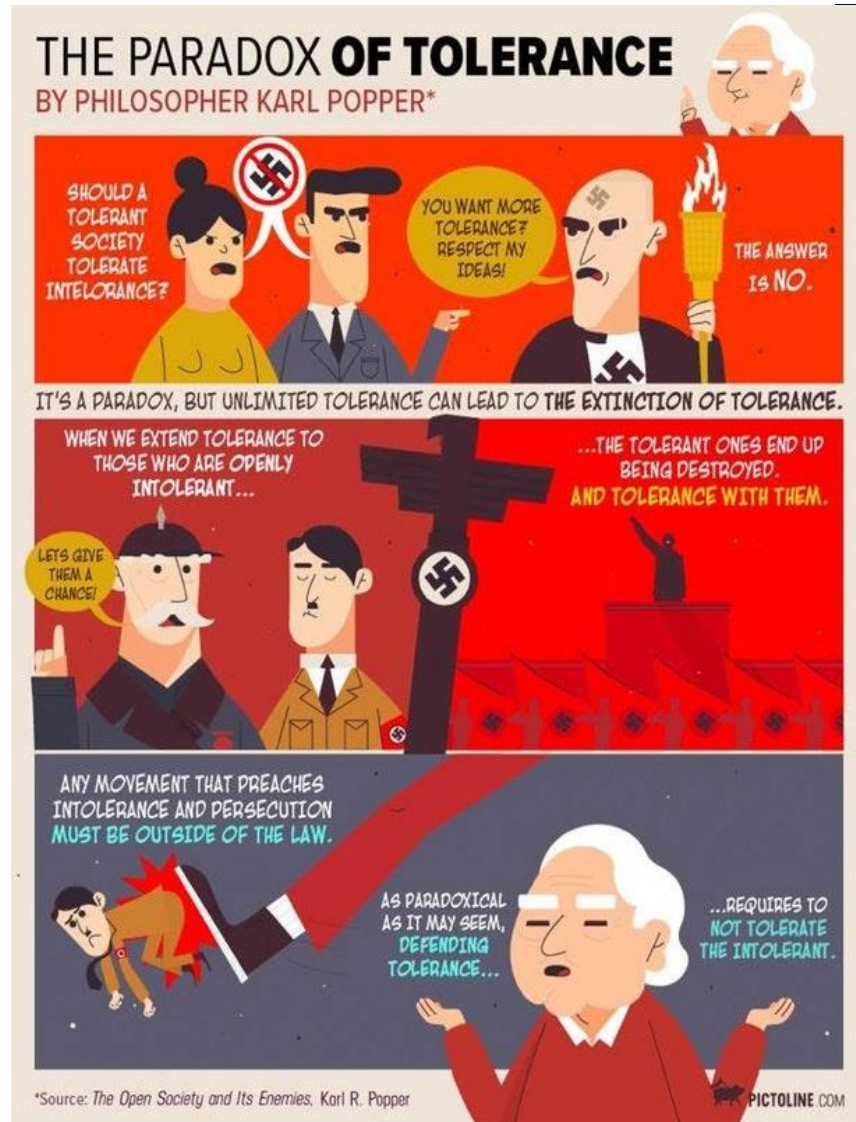
NANCY PELOSI

“If we only talk politics to people we agree with, how are we ever going to move forward? But that’s where we’re at,” Murphy said. “We’re afraid to talk politics because we’re afraid it’s going to escalate into yelling and screaming and people getting mad at each other.”

A quote from a Washington Post article called Politicians Can't Seem to do It, But These Citizens Are Learning How to Find Common Ground

**“OUR LIVES BEGIN TO END THE DAY WE BECOME SILENT ABOUT THE THINGS THAT MATTER.”**

—MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.



*It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.*  
--ARISTOTLE

When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new.

**Political Discourse is Getting Dangerously Anti-Intellectual**  
Image, emotion, and lack of substance define politics today  
Posted Dec 30, 2015

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

Which idea resonates most with you? Are there any ideas here that you hadn't already thought or heard of? How do these ideas and quotes differ from each other? Is there just one idea that is right? Are any of them not worth considering? Do you agree with all of the ideas presented? Are there certain conditions for each idea and its usefulness?