

# Lesson Plan 1 What makes an issue controversial?

This introductory lesson uses discussion to explore what some of the factors are which make issues controversial. This lesson serves as a launching pad for exploration of the skills that prove useful when faced with some of these characteristics of controversial issues.



## Learning Objectives

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- To be able to understand and define what 'controversial issues' are
- To explore different factors that make an issue controversial
- Explore factors that can characterise controversy

## Preparation

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- F&BF 'Controversial Issues' film
- PowerPoint 1 for class
- Board / space to write
- Envelope with slips of paper, 'controversial issues', one per 5–6 students
- Space for 'opinion spectrum' – YES and NO signs to hang on either side of the room

## Running time

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50 mins

## Curriculum mapping

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These pages show indicative maps of where we think this package fits with the RE, PSHE and Citizenship curricula:

Subject	RE
<p><b>1 Living Difference III</b></p> <p>Approach to enquiry five key steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Communicate</b> and <b>Apply</b> to their own and others' experience</li><li>• <b>Enquire</b> and <b>Contextualise</b> to engage intellectually</li><li>• <b>Evaluate</b> to discern value for others and themselves</li></ul>	<p><b>2 The national curriculum framework for RE (NCFRE)</b></p> <p><b>KS3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• B2. Observe and interpret a wide range of ways in which commitment and identity are expressed. They develop insightful analysis and evaluation of controversies about commitment to religions and worldviews, accounting for the impact of diversity within and between communities.</li><li>• C3. Explore and express insights into significant moral and ethical questions posed by being human in ways that are well-informed and which invite personal response, using reasoning which may draw on a range of examples from real life, fiction or other forms of media.</li></ul>

## Curriculum mapping

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Subject <b>PSHE</b>	
<b>PSHE Association Programme of Study for PSHE education</b> <i>Updated to include the statutory requirements outlined in the new RSE curriculum</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>CORE THEME 1: HEALTH AND WELLBEING</b></li></ul>	
<b>KS3 Learning opportunities in Health and Wellbeing</b> Self-concept <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• H1. how we are all unique; that recognising and demonstrating personal strengths build self-confidence, self-esteem and good health and wellbeing</li><li>• H4. simple strategies to help build resilience to negative opinions, judgements and comments</li><li>• H5. to recognise and manage internal and external influences on decisions which affect health and wellbeing</li></ul>	<b>KS4 Learning opportunities in Health and Wellbeing</b> Self-concept <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• H1. to accurately assess their areas of strength and development, and where appropriate, act upon feedback</li><li>• H2. how self-confidence self-esteem, and mental health are affected positively and negatively by internal and external influences and ways of managing this</li><li>• H4. strategies to develop assertiveness and build resilience to peer and other influences that affect both how they think about themselves and their health and wellbeing</li></ul>

## Curriculum mapping

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Subject <b>Citizenship</b>	
<b>Citizenship programmes of study: National curriculum in England</b>	
<b>KS3</b> Pupils should use and apply their knowledge and understanding whilst developing skills to research and interrogate evidence, debate and evaluate viewpoints, present reasoned arguments and take informed action.	<b>KS4</b> Pupils should develop their skills to be able to use a range of research strategies, weigh up evidence, make persuasive arguments and substantiate their conclusions. They should experience and evaluate different ways that citizens can act together to solve problems and contribute to society.

Resources

**Introduction** / 5 mins

Lesson 1 PPT

**Re-visit Safe Space**

Activity 1

Write the phrase **Controversial Issues** on the board.

Board /  
space to write

Ask your class to write this title in their notes, then to score themselves 1–5 on how well they feel they can explain what it means (1 not well at all, 5 very well). Then refer to the phrase on the board again and ask your class, what does this mean? Take some responses and add key words around the phrase.

Explain that this lesson we'll be exploring the definition of a controversial issue and the factors that can characterise it.

Safe Space  
Agreement

Re-cap your **Safe Space Agreement**: particularly for this discussion-heavy session, remember to 'step down' if you have had the opportunity to contribute a lot, and to encourage others to 'step up' if we haven't heard much from them.

## Main Activity Opinion Spectrum / 40 mins

Envelope with slips of paper, controversial issues (one per × 5–6 students)

Space for 'opinion spectrum' – YES and NO signs to hang on either side of the room

Board / space to write

### Part One / 15 mins

Divide the students into groups of 5 or 6 and give them each an envelope with different issues inside. Explain that they have to take each issue at a time and discuss whether or not these issues are 'controversial'. They can make three piles, YES / NO / IT DEPENDS.

In the pack of assets for this package you will find a list of issues to cut out and put in the envelopes, but we encourage you to include issues particularly interesting to your students.

*Issues include:*

- climate change
- abortion
- children's literature
- immigration
- diet
- sexuality
- sports
- war
- religion

**Important:** The aim is to have meaningful discussion and think about what makes a controversial issue. The aim is NOT to descend into a discussion or debate about the issue itself. There is no wrong or right answer and it's more important to share views than to get through all the issues!

## Main Activity Opinion Spectrum / 40 mins

### Part Two / 20 mins:

Ask the students to collect and return the envelopes then to stand up and, where possible, congregate in the middle of the room. Explain that the whole room is now a spectrum, or a line, with one side of the room representing 'YES', the other side of the room representing 'NO', the middle of the line being 'IT DEPENDS' and the rest of the room or line being somewhere along that spectrum.

Explain that you will read out the list of issues, and ask students to go to the point in the room which they feel answers the main question: **Is this a controversial issue?**

Remind students that there's no wrong or right answer – it's the discussion here that counts. It's OK for them to change their opinions and argue something different to their original ideas in the group. They are now all acting alone and don't have to agree with their group.

After each issue and when all students are in place, ask a few volunteers (try to take volunteers from different points in the spectrum to illustrate the diversity of opinion) to explain why they have answered YES or NO, or somewhere in the middle. As students discuss, write some of the key points on the board – i.e. what does or doesn't make an issue controversial? What does it depend on?

Once you have done enough issues, ask all the students to take a seat.

## Main Activity Opinion Spectrum / 40 mins

### Part Three / 5 mins:

Before you go through the key points you've written on the board, ask students to reflect on controversial issues as a whole. They may discuss with the person next to them before you take some responses.

- What do these issues have in common?
- How do they make us feel?
- What makes them challenging?
- How / when do we engage?

Add these points to the board, and then help to summarise them. Some of the points about controversial issues which may have arisen during your discussions may be:

- They divide opinion and sometimes communities
- They are complex and can spark heated debate
- They can evoke emotional reactions and be difficult to talk about
- They can become taboo
- The information surrounding them can be subject to control or exaggeration, etc.
- They can be subject to time and geographical context, demographic, etc.

## Plenary Reflection session / 5 mins

'Controversial  
Issues' film

Explain that following on from the Safe Space and Identity packages, we'll be exploring a package around Controversial Issues and how to approach them in a dialogue setting: what are the challenges; what are the skills we need?

Play the entire F&BF film for this package.

Take any questions or reflections from the class.

Finally, ask them to return to their original self-score (How well can you explain what controversial issues are? 1 – not well at all, 5 – very well) and give themselves a revised number.

## Homework / Preparation for next lesson...

Ask your students to write 300 words, answering the following two questions:

- 1** What makes an issue controversial?
- 2** Can you describe a time you were involved in dialogue or debate over a controversial issue? How did the situation play out, and how did you feel?