

## Lesson Plan 6 **Should the government rehabilitate convicted persons with life sentences?**

Diversity exists within and across groups – both individuals and groups are complex, therefore issues are too. This lesson looks at what happens when we oversimplify issues and our responses to them.

### **Factor:**

All the factors we have explored so far (issues evoke strong emotions, are often surrounded by misinformation, can expose fundamental differences, etc.) can make it challenging to approach controversial issues with an open mind and with a sense that we are free to change our minds. This can polarize us into ‘camps’ which are hard to deviate from if they are tied up in our identity / notion of loyalty. This means that our own arguments can have weak spots, while we blindly overlook anything of use in a seemingly opposing perspective.

### **Skill:**

Flexibility – how can we resist the idea of ‘camps’ surrounding a certain issue, and open up space for fluidity and complexity?  
From identity package: who are we?



## Learning Objectives

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- To identify the dangers of siding with one 'camp' around a controversial issue
- To reflect on the importance of keeping an open-mind and actively listening

## Preparation

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- F&BF 'Controversial Issues' film
- PowerPoint 6 for class
- Safe Space Agreement and 'Parking' sheet
- YES / NO flags
- Envelope containing activity resources, one per group of approx. ten students:
  - name stickers
  - pack of statements
  - three fake statements from the other side
  - plain A4 placards
- 'Top Tips for flexibility' handout, one per student

## 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>	
● <b>CORE THEME 2: RELATIONSHIPS</b>	
<b>KS3 Learning opportunities in Relationships and Sex Education</b> Social influences <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● R42. to recognise peer influence and to develop strategies for managing it, including online</li><li>● R44. that the need for peer approval can generate feelings of pressure and lead to increased risk-taking; strategies to manage this</li><li>● R45. about the factors that contribute to young people joining gangs; the social, legal and physical consequences of gang behaviours</li><li>● R46. strategies to manage pressure to join a gang, exit strategies and how to access appropriate support</li></ul>	<b>KS4 Learning opportunities in Relationships and Sex Education</b> Social influences <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● R35. to evaluate ways in which their behaviours may influence their peers, positively and negatively, including online, and in situations involving weapons or gangs</li><li>● R36. skills to support younger peers when in positions of influence</li><li>● R37. to recognise situations where they are being adversely influenced, or are at risk, due to being part of a particular group or gang; strategies to access appropriate help</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.

Lesson 6 PPT

Recap the package so far with the ongoing barriers to and top tips for approaching controversial issues slide: explain that we've thought about:

- 1 Being unsure of oneself:** being reflective and prepared in order to increase self-confidence;
- 2 Facing misinformation:** developing skills for critical thinking so as to consume information responsibly and constructively;
- 3 Strong emotional reactions:** developing emotional literacy so as to avoid derailment of discussion;
- 4 Sometimes it's impossible to agree:** accepting the fact that we all come from different backgrounds and taking the opportunity to learn.

F&BF  
'Controversial  
Issues' film

The last thing we will learn about is how to resist getting stuck in a 'camp' over a particular issue. Play the relevant scene from our film.

## Introduction / 10 mins

Ask your students to suggest topics which have been polarising in recent times. Ask for responses to the following:

- How do we become polarised? Do we sometimes feel we're on a 'side' of an issue we don't know much about? How does this happen / who can influence this?
- How does it feel to be on one 'side' of an issue?
- How do we speak about the other 'side'? (See the PowerPoint for examples)
- How easy is it to agree with or promote the ideas of the other side?
- What is the danger in being polarised in this way?

Write some key ideas down on the board. Ask them to keep the last two questions in mind and we will return to them at the end of the lesson.

Review your **Safe Space Agreement** and refer once again to this session's 'parking' sheet.

Safe Space  
Agreement

'Parking' sheet

## Main Activity A 'Camp'-Style Argument / 30 mins

Write the issue for this on the board: **Should the government rehabilitate convicted persons with life sentences?** Explain the word 'rehabilitate' if unknown and discuss some of the crimes for which people are currently serving life sentences in the UK (see the PowerPoint presentation for details).

YES / NO flags

Ask students to then go to either side of the room depending on their answer to this question (one side being YES and the other NO). Does anyone think it depends? Sometimes it seems there's no room in public discourse for a 'middle-way', e.g. if there's a national referendum, or a law being introduced. They must choose a side.

Envelope containing activity resources

Once they have done this, give both sides a YES / NO flag to put up. Give both groups an envelope (if you have a large class you may want to split them into smaller groups and create more resources). Firstly, they should take out the name stickers. They must choose a colour for their 'side' and each draw the same symbol in that colour on their name sticker, and then wear it. At this point they can choose a name for their side and add it to their flag.

Then ask them to pull out the statements from their envelopes. These are the arguments for their side, those which support the stances on the issue, i.e. the YES side has reasons for why the government SHOULD rehabilitate these persons, and the NO side for why they SHOULDN'T. Ask them to huddle and quietly read them (They all have the same statements, but it's important that they don't know this yet!).

Then, give them three 'statements' from the other side. These are made-up and inflammatory. Let them digest these too in their groups, and then as a whole group ask them how they feel about their statements? Do they feel they are on the right side? Then when they see each other's responses, ask them how they feel about the other side?

## Main Activity A 'Camp'-Style Argument / 30 mins

Then, in their designated colour, they should work as a group to write some responses on the plain 'placards' given in the envelopes. These should be words relating to how they feel about their statements, as well as how they feel about the other side, e.g.: PROUD, RIGHT, CORRECT, APPROPRIATE, FAIR, JUST vs UNFAIR, IMMORAL, SHORT-SIGHTED (although your students' responses may be more nuanced!).

While they are doing this, pull out one student from each group and send them to the other side to have a look at their statements, and then back to you. They'll have noticed that the statements are the same on both sides. Send them back to their own side to try and convince them that other is right about some things, without giving away the key piece of information. They can say generic things like 'some of them are arguing from a good place' or 'some of our values actually do align' or 'maybe they are right about some things'. Give their groups a minute or so to react and then ask everyone to stop what they are doing.

- Ask the YES side to read out the placards they have written for the other side, and explain why
  - Then ask the NO side how they feel about these words
  - Ask the NO side to read out their statement cards
- [Of course, they all have the same cards!]**
- Ask both sides why they didn't know they had the same ones?
  - Why did they only have conversations in their own groups?
  - For those who visited the other side, how easy was it to get your own side to listen?
  - For those who received them, how did you feel about what they were saying?
  - What does this simulation represent?

Put the resources away and ask all your students to take their seats.

## Reflection / 10 mins

Bring your class back together and pull up the two questions from the introduction. Ask them to discuss the answers with the person next to them and then take some responses.

- **How easy is it to agree with or promote the ideas of the other 'side'?**  
Not easy at all, may be labeled a traitor, etc, or accused of undermining the cause of your own 'side'.
- **What is the danger in being polarised in this way?**  
It makes thinking critically about either position difficult. Easy to dehumanise the other side, critique the people rather than the views. Makes it difficult to remain open-minded or even feel it's possible to change one's mind

Once they have done this, ask them to write a few lines in their books in response to the following question:

- **How can we better approach a controversial issue when we find ourselves on a particular 'side'?**

Ask for a couple of volunteers to read their responses.

If you are following the package, distribute this week's 'top tips' and ask the students to stick them in their books.

'Top Tips  
for flexibility'  
handout,  
one per student

**Key skill for engaging in controversial discussion: flexibility**

Top tips for coping with the tendency to form 'camps' around an issue:

- Always be aware of how you are forming and voicing your opinion around an issue; are you following the group you find yourself in?
- Do you see another 'side' of the issue, and if so have you tried to find common ground?
- Take time to think about arguments and perspectives 'opposing' yours with an open mind
- Try to remain critical about the things you are hearing about an issue; avoid divisive rhetoric like 'them' and 'us' or statements which make assumptions about what people who don't agree with you believe, or who they are.

## Homework

Ask your students to choose a controversial topic they are uncomfortable with and write a personal strategy for how to approach conversation around it. They should describe where the conversation takes place and with who.

They can use the skills we have covered in this package to help them structure the strategy, i.e.

- 1 First establishing who they are and what they will bring to the discussion
- 2 For the information they are lacking, how to sensibly and safely research it further
- 3 What emotions they anticipate to be invoked in themselves and others, and how to respond
- 4 What they fear will be the sticking points, red lines or dead ends, and what they can still gain
- 5 How to resist falling into one 'camp' of the issue and reach their own resolution

F&BF  
'Controversial  
Issues' film

The main character in our film takes this journey in this order and may be a helpful resource to your students when thinking about the process. This should take them one hour and fill around two A4 pages.