

Making Sense of World Conflicts

Lesson plan 5: Is it war?

Age group: 14–17

Objectives

To explore the meanings of ‘conflict’ and ‘war’. To make deductions and practise reasoning skills.

Learning outcomes

Pupils will have practised thinking skills and discussed a topical issue.

You will need

Worksheet: When is a conflict war? (below) – one for each pair of pupils. Ideally the statements should be cut up separately so they can physically be moved around. Pupils could cut them up themselves, as they are printed in the wrong order. The **Worksheet: Answers to When is conflict a war?** and **Worksheet: The rules of war - International Humanitarian Law** (below) are optional.

What to do

Starter

1. Ask the class in pairs to write two sentences – one using the word ‘conflict’ and one using the word ‘war’. Ask for examples with explanations of why they have chosen particular contexts. Have a brief discussion about any ideas or ‘rules’ that emerge about the different usage and meanings.

Activity

2. Then give pairs or threes of pupils the 14 cut up sentences from **When is conflict a war?** (below). These sentences were originally written in the order given in the box at the bottom of this page but have been muddled up except for the first and last sentence.

3. Pupils should read the statements and sequence them to put them in an order which makes sense and answers the question, ‘What is the difference between war and conflict?’ They should create a readable piece which follows a logical argument and which gives an explanation of differences and similarities between conflict and war.

If carried out as an English lesson pupils can be directed towards the language clues such as the conjunctive words at the beginning of sentences, as well as looking at the content. They can try different sequences and consider the reasons for coming to their final conclusion. This activity requires high level thinking skills. It encourages pupils to sort, classify, sequence, compare and to analyse structure and syntax. There is also a copy of the **answers** (below).

4. Obtain feedback from the pairs. First of all discuss the different sequences that pupils have identified and ask for reasons for their choices. In an English lesson pupils might discuss how similar or different the results are and the consequent changes in meaning.

5. Discuss the content of the piece. Is there anything they didn't understand that needs clarifying? Do they agree with the points made? In their own words can they answer the question about the difference between war and conflict?

Closing discussion

6. Why do pupils think that 'war' and 'conflict' are sometimes used loosely as terms? Can there really be 'a war on terror' or a 'war on drugs'? Have a brief discussion.

7. You could bring in the fact that there are strict rules governing the conduct of war, which have been agreed on by all world governments. These rules aim to protect civilians, prisoners of war and casualties. They are part of International Humanitarian Law, and include the fact that civilians may not be directly attacked, for example. The rules are summarised in the handout, **The rules of war: International Humanitarian Law** (below).

Further work

8. For homework they could collect and comment on some examples from literature they have read or newspapers and magazines.

9. An extension to this activity could be to access a range of newspapers from around the world through online newspapers and to compare their use of the words 'war' and 'conflict' in main headlines. You could suggest that pupils are alert to the use and meaning of the terms in literature and the media in future.

A suggested order for the statements is A, G, I, K, B, D, F, L, E, H, M, J, C, N.
There are other possibilities which can be discussed with pupils.

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Worksheet: When is conflict a war?

All these sentences belong to one article but have been mixed up apart from the first and last which are in their original positions. Rearrange the order of the sentences to make a piece of writing that makes sense, and is a readable whole.

A When would conflict be described as war? Are there criteria which enable us to identify what war is?

B We could narrow war down to armed conflict.

C However, this definition shows us the dangers of declaring a so-called 'war' on problems like drugs and terrorism.

D But countries have existed in states of declared war against each other without any actual armed conflict occurring.

E Today, military forces find themselves in combat with terrorist or rebel groups, who are beyond clear government control. Is this war? Government involvement is usually thought to be required for the existence of 'war'.

F Perhaps we can simply define 'war' as a conflict when an official declaration of war is made.

G A very general way to define war would be a state of conflict between states or nations.

H Military forces may also find themselves in high-level policing or peacekeeping functions which look quite a lot like war.

I But conflicts between nations may be carried out in various ways which we would not normally call 'war'.

J In other words, a state of war is a condition which is believed to allow for behaviour and action normally considered illegal or immoral. Examples include killing others (including innocent people), destruction of property and lying.

K These ways could include diplomacy (talking to try and find a solution), economic sanctions (stopping trade with a country) and propaganda (producing exaggerated or false information about the opponent).

L But that doesn't seem quite correct because many long, brutal conflicts including civil wars occur without any official declarations of war, such as the conflict that took place in Vietnam.

M War certainly involves conflict and force and a number of different factors may play a role in the situation. What is crucial, however, is that these factors would not be permitted during a state of peace.

N The use of the word 'war' can express the seriousness of the problem and the commitment of the government to use many resources in the effort. It may also lead to a point where otherwise immoral or illegal actions become 'normal.'

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Worksheet: Answers

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K These ways could include diplomacy (talking to try and find a solution), economic sanctions (stopping trade with a country) and propaganda (producing exaggerated or false information about the opponent).

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J In other words, a state of war is a condition which is believed to allow for behaviour and action normally considered illegal or immoral. Examples include killing others (including innocent people), destruction of property and lying.

C However, this definition shows us the dangers of declaring a so-called 'war' on problems like drugs and terrorism.

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The rules of war: international humanitarian law

Can acts of war ever be justified? Over the centuries people have thought about this and written books about it. Most people agreed that it was all right for your country to fight back if it was attacked. However, there was some disagreement about whether wars should be fought to resolve other types of dispute.

Now, whether a country may actually use force is governed by a part of international law set out in the United Nations Charter of 1945 which binds nations to live together in peace with one another as good neighbours. Countries are not allowed to use force except:

- in self-defence, or
- when authorised to do so by the United Nations Security Council.

The way a war is fought today is governed by international humanitarian law, which provides a set of rules which seek to limit the effects of armed conflict. A major part of international humanitarian law is found in the Geneva Conventions of 1949, supplemented by the Additional Protocols of 1977 relating to the protection of victims of armed conflicts.

International humanitarian law: the essential rules

The essence of international humanitarian law is summarised below. These rules apply to guerrilla fighters as much as to conventional armies:

- The parties to a conflict must at all times distinguish between civilians and soldiers or fighters in order to spare civilians and their property.
- Attacks may only be made against military targets. Civilians and other people who do not or can no longer take part in the fighting (for example prisoners or wounded soldiers) must not be attacked. ‘Terrorist’ attacks directed against civilians are thus clearly illegal.
- Armed forces must also take all possible precautions to ensure that they do not kill civilians by accident.
- Neither the parties to the conflict nor members of their armed forces have an unlimited right to choose methods and means of warfare. It is forbidden to use weapons or methods of warfare that are likely to cause unnecessary suffering.
- The wounded and sick must be collected and cared for, no matter which side they fight for. Medical personnel and medical establishments, transport and equipment must not be attacked. The red cross or red crescent on a white background is the distinctive sign which identifies such persons and objects.
- Captured soldiers or fighters and civilians who find themselves under the authority of their enemies must be treated humanely and protected against all acts of violence or revenge. They are entitled to exchange news with their families and receive help.