

II.

DEFINING WAR, EXPLORING THE MEANING OF PEACE

Lesson 3: The Meaning(s) of War and Peace

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Activity)

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Lesson 3:

The Meaning(s) of War and Peace

While war is a frequent topic in history classes, literature and discussions of contemporary issues, we seldom pause to consider precisely what we mean when we use the word. The same can be said for peace. This lesson engages students in critically examining the different meanings of both words.

Objectives:

- ✧ Students will develop their academic literacy by engaging in critical examination of the meanings of words commonly used in history;
- ✧ Students will appreciate the complexities of developing precise definitions to use when discussing war and peace in historical and contemporary contexts.

Materials: A copy of the graphic organizer “War/Peace Is/Is Not” for each student.

A large Is/Is Not chart to use for class feedback (this can be on the board.)

If desired, copies of the “Various Attempts at a Definition” for both War and Peace.

Procedure: Before beginning the discussion, have the “structure” sentences, but not the suggested answers (see below) written on the board.

PART I: WORDS AND MEANINGS (an “into” activity)

1. Tell students that in the course of studying history, literature, or just talking about contemporary affairs, they will inevitably encounter the topics of war and peace. The purpose of this activity is to become more aware of how we and others think about these terms.

Hand out the graphic organizer, “War/Peace Is/Is Not.” Instruct students to write down their ideas.

2. Take class feedback, using the Is/Is Not chart to record student responses. Discuss the results. Did everyone agree? Is every “conflict” a “war”? Which of the terms did they find harder to define, war or peace? Why do they think this is?

3. Explain that often it is hard to define a word because it has a variety of related, but different meanings.

Direct their attention to the following sentences (on the board):

He needed to structure his thoughts more clearly. (organize)

After the storm only two structures were left standing. (building)

The structure of the atom has a nucleus at the center. (design/arrangement)

The child had no structure in his life. (organization/routine)

The current economic structure isn’t working very well. (arrangement)

Have them work with a partner to brainstorm words they can use to replace “structure” without changing the meaning of each sentence. Possibilities are suggested in parentheses.

4. Take feedback, writing the replacement words next to each sentence. Ask for reactions. Can they identify an underlying meaning that all of the different uses of “structure” have? (The idea of organizing different parts – How would that apply to *buildings*?) Be sure students can articulate that the same word can have related, but different meanings depending on how it is used.

PART II: DEFINING WAR

5. Explain that the word “war” is like “structure”, only even more complicated. Write the following phrases on the board:

at war with himself	(intrapersonal conflict)
a war of words	(conflict or competition re: an idea)
the War on Drugs	(attempt to eradicate a particular kind of behavior)
warring factions	(competing)
the Vietnam War	(political entities engaged in violent conflict)

In this case, there is not a single word that can replace “war” in each of the phrases, but the meanings are not exactly the same. Give them a few minutes to work with their partner to try to articulate what the meaning of “war” is in each of these phrases. Possibilities are suggested in parentheses.

6. Take class feedback and work to clarify and distinguish the different meanings. Have them refer back to the Is/Is Not chart. Which of the meanings of “war” did they have in mind when they made the chart?

7. Tell students that scholars who study war often disagree on the specific details of the definition of war, but in general, the wars that we most often study in history can be roughly defined as follows:

“War is large-scale violent conflict between organized groups that are governments or that aim to establish a governments” (in control of a given land area.)

- R. Glossop, *Confronting War: And Examination of Humanity’s Most Pressing Problem*, Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc, (1994: 9)

Have students consider: Under this definition

- Would the American Revolution qualify as war? (Yes, because England was a government, and the Americans were trying to set up a separate government.)
- Would gang warfare qualify as war? (No, because neither gang is trying to establish a government, although they may be trying to control territory for special uses.)
- Would the conflicts with the Native Americans qualify as war? (Most of the time, because the U.S. government was trying to take control of the land occupied by Native Americans.)
- Would the police busting up a local drug ring qualify as war? (No, because it isn’t large-scale.)

Extension activity for more advanced students:

Handout and have students read “War – Various Attempts at a Definition.” Conduct a Socratic Seminar based on the handout (see below.)

Socratic Seminar:

1. In quote #1, John Vasquez implies that “war” should be a verb, not a noun. Why does he think treating “war” as a noun is misleading? Do you agree?
2. Quincy Wright (quote #4) argues that war is a “legal condition.” Can you find support for this idea in any of the other quotes? Do you think he is right?
3. Do you think there are any significant differences between the definitions of war offered by Glossop (#2), Wright (#3) and Bull (#4)? Can you think of any instances where one of the definitions might apply but another not?
4. Clausewitz’s comment that “War is a mere continuation of policy by other means” is very famous. It is also a focus of contentious debate. What do you think he meant? Why might people feel strongly about this comment?
5. Why do you think scholars have struggle to develop a satisfactory definition of war?

PART III: EXPLORING THE MEANING OF PEACE

8. Students need the “War/Peace Is/Is Not” page they filled out in Part I. Place students in small groups. Handout the “Peace Is... Group Worksheet.” Go over the instructions to make sure they understand the assignment.

9. Share out. As one student group describes a “meaning cluster”, list the words they included on the board and ask if any other groups have a similar cluster. If there are words they have that were not included by the first group, add them to the list on the board. Have a different group share a *different* cluster, repeating the procedure until all of the results are recorded. There will probably be some discussion and disagreement on exactly where a particular word belongs, and/or what the different clusters should be.

10. Handout the worksheet “What Is Peace?” Discuss: How well do the different definitions match up with the clusters of meaning developed by the class? Individually, students complete the worksheet, writing a sentence containing the word “peace” that expresses each of the different meanings.

11. Conclude by pointing out that scholars who study peace have even more trouble agreeing on a single definition than do scholars who study war. In fact,

“....some ‘peace thinkers’¹ have abandoned any single and all-encompassing definition of peace. Rather, they promote the idea of many peaces.... peace does not necessarily have to be something humans might achieve “some day.” They contend that peace exists in the present, we can create and expand it in small ways in our everyday lives, and peace changes constantly.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace>

¹ E.g. Wolfgang Dietrich, Wolfgang Sützl, and the Innsbruck School of Peace Studies

WAR	
IS	IS NOT
PEACE	
IS	IS NOT

“WAR”– Various Attempts at a Definition

1. “An emphasis on the fighting and killing in war makes it clear that war is an activity, not an object with its own ontological existence. The tendency of English ... to describe activities by nouns rather than verbs fundamentally distorts the world we are trying to understand. Instead of seeing war as something mechanically caused by certain factors, it might be more illuminating to see war as an action to which states resort when faced with certain situations...”

“...Above all, war consists of fighting and killing. It is one of the most salient features of war that killing, which is generally frowned upon, if not prohibited, within a group, is encouraged and honored in war.”

- John A Vasquez, *The War Puzzle*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 38, 40

2. “War is large-scale violent conflict between organized groups that are governments or that aim to establish governments.”

- R. Glossop, *Confronting War: And Examination of Humanity’s Most Pressing Problem*, Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc, (1994: 9)

3. War is “the *legal condition* which *equally* permits two or more *hostile groups* to carry on a *conflict by armed force*” (italics in original)

- Quincy Wright, 1965:8

4. The following definitions are commented on by John A Vasquez in *The War Puzzle*, pp. 22-39:

“War is organized violence carried on by political units against each other.”

- Hedley Bull, 1977:184

“War is a mere continuation of policy by other means.”

“War therefore is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will.”

- Clausewitz, 1832, Book I, ch 1, sections 2 and 24, J.J. Graham translation.

Vasquez (pp. 24-25) comments that Hedley Bull’s definition has three implications: First,

“...war is an organized activity with rules and customs... Second,

“...war is not random violence, but focused and directed.” and third,

“...it is organized in the sense that it is collective and social, not individual.”

Vasquez (p. 39) comments that Clausewitz’s discussion implies that

“...war is a *political instrument of force*. It is political in that it is more frequently... associated with political activity than any other... It is an instrument in that those who wage war attempt, at some point, to use it as a calculated ‘rational’ means to an end. It is force in that it is a means that attempts to compel opponents to do something they will not do freely.”

PEACE IS....

Instructions:

1. Using your “War/Peace Is/Is Not” worksheets, list all of the *different* words or phrases that the members of your group used to describe what peace is in the left column. If more than one of you have used the same word or phrase, list it only once.
2. Do some of the words or phrases have very similar meanings? (For example, “a treaty to end a war” and “an agreement between nations to stop fighting” are very similar) Working together, try to form 4 – 6 clusters of words/phrases that generally mean the same thing.

Rewrite the list on the left in the right column, this time clustering them by meaning. Make sure all of the words listed on the left are included on the right (even if a word ends up being its own cluster!) Underline a word in each cluster that you feel best represents the meaning of the cluster overall.

PEACE IS ...	MEANING CLUSTERS

WHAT IS PEACE?

1. an agreement between those who have been at war to end hostilities or fighting
2. a period of time during which there is no war
3. a state of security or public order within a community
4. harmony in personal relationships
5. freedom from upsetting thoughts or emotions
6. a state of tranquility or quiet

Can you write a sentence that expresses each of the meanings of peace? For example:

1. The Seminole are the only tribe of Native Americans that never signed a peace treaty with the U.S. government.

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

Lesson 4:

THE LEXICON OF WAR AND PEACE IN TEXTBOOKS

Impressions about the nature of and reasons for military conflicts are generally developed second-hand by American school children. History textbooks provide one of the primary sources for students' formation of concepts concerning war and other types of armed conflicts as students study the wide variety of armed conflicts that have occurred in history. Yet as teachers, we rarely ask our students to critically examine and think about the ways that different conflicts are described in their texts, and how those descriptions might influence their perceptions.

Orienting Questions:

1. What words are used in our textbooks to indicate that physical or armed conflict occurred between two groups of people?
2. What determines the use of the different words or phrases?
3. Do our textbooks provide any guidelines for distinguishing war from other kinds of conflicts?
4. What explanations do our textbooks give for the causes of physical/armed conflict?
5. What do our textbooks have to say about peace?
6. Based upon what they read in textbooks, what conclusions might students draw about the nature of war and peace?

Objectives:

- To reinforce student learning about different conflicts in history.
- To develop students' critical reading skills through attention to word usage and meaning;
- To develop students' skills in critically evaluating underlying values and/or biases of a text;
- To engage students in thinking about the meanings of the range of terms used to refer to armed conflict in history textbooks;
- To develop students' critical thinking skills through reflection about the ways in which textbook descriptions help shape their own attitudes and impressions of different historic events.

How/When to Use: Grades 5 – 12. There a number of different ways to use this activity.

- The activity can be introduced at the beginning of the year as an exercise accompanying each new unit of study. At the end of the year a cumulative comparison can be done.
- Alternatively, the activity can be assigned three to four times throughout the year as part of a combined review of several units of study. At the end of the year a cumulative comparison can be done.

PART II: THE CAUSES OF WAR

7. In their groups, have students examine the causes given by the textbook of each of the conflicts they found. (Refer back to their individual worksheets.) Be prepared to report out on:

- the different *kinds* of causes mentioned by the textbook; and,
- any relationships or patterns they see between the causes cited and
 - a. the parties to the conflict
 - b. the importance of the conflict
 - c. who won the conflict
 - d. any other relationships or patterns they may observe

8. Discuss with the class:

- What different kinds of explanations did the textbook provide for the causes of different conflicts? (In some cases, the text may have provided no explanation at all.)
- What patterns did they observe between the types of causes mentioned by the text and other factors?
- Based on their textbooks, what conclusions might they draw about the causes of war?
- Overall, do they think their textbooks do a good job explaining different kinds of armed conflict and their causes? Why or why not?

PART III: PEACE

This can be used as a year-long monitoring exercise, or it may be done as a cumulative review activity at the end of the year.

9. Tell students that the class will be monitoring what our textbooks have to say about peace. Each time they come across a discussion of peace or the use of the word, they will add it to the chart. Periodically, and at the end of the year, we will compare how our textbooks discuss peace to their treatment of war.

10. *Either* post a bulletin board in the room (or use an electronic bulletin board) using the format on Student Worksheet #2, or give each student their own copy of Worksheet #2 to keep in their notebooks as a year-long recording device. If using the latter approach, remind students periodically to record the information on their worksheets.

11. At the end of the year, or periodically when enough references to peace have occurred in the text to provide a basis for comparison and generalization, engage the students in the following Socratic Seminar. (Note: Peace is mentioned far less frequently than conflict or war, so it will take a while to compile a sufficient numbers of instances.)

Socratic Seminar

1. Is peace a common topic in our textbooks? When does it get discussed? Why do you think that is?
2. How is peace described in our textbooks? What other words or descriptions are used to indicate peace? How does this compare with words used in the textbook to indicate war? Why do you think this difference exists?
3. Does the textbook pay more attention to peace or to war? What about periods when there is no war – are they described as peaceful? In your opinion, are periods between wars always peaceful? Why?
4. What does the textbook have to say about the causes of peace? We often say that people or nations “go to war” or “make war.” Do you believe people can “go to peace” or “make peace?”

NAME: _____

Geographic Region, Culture or Time Period: _____

Look for instances of armed conflict in the assigned section of your textbook. How do you know it is an armed conflict? What words are used that suggest this? (examples: "attacked" "revolt" "invade" "captured" etc.) Use additional worksheets if needed to cover all the conflicts.

1. <u>Conflict</u> (chapter & page #):		1. <u>Conflict</u> (chapter & page #):	
2. List all words or phrases that indicate that a conflict took place.	3. Who were the parties to the conflict?	2. List all words or phrases that indicate that a conflict took place.	3. Who were the parties to the conflict?
4. Was this a major conflict? Yes _____ No _____ Explain your answer.		4. Was this a major conflict? Yes _____ No _____ Explain your answer.	
5. Was this a war? Yes _____ No _____ Explain your answer.		5. Was this a war? Yes _____ No _____ Explain your answer.	
6. According to the textbook, what were the causes of this conflict?		6. According to the textbook, what were the causes of this conflict?	

Group Instructions

Use the group worksheet “Comparing Textbook Descriptions of Conflict” to record the requested information for four different conflicts identified by group members.

1. Enter the name of the conflict.
2. List the parties involved in the column for each conflict.
3. List the words used in the textbook to describe that conflict by comparing the lists of words different people have recorded for each conflict (box #2 on individual worksheets.) Some people may have listed different words used to describe the same conflict. If so, verify (by going back to the text) that all of the words listed are correct.

Discuss: Are there differences in the kinds of words or phrases used to describe different conflicts? If so, why do you think that might be?

4. For each of the conflicts on the group worksheet, compare how group members answered the questions in box #4 on their individual worksheets.

Discuss: Does everyone agree? Why? If not, discuss the differences in your responses, listening carefully to each others’ perspectives, and respectfully debating any differences of opinion.

Be prepared to report out to the class on your discussions.

GROUP WORKSHEET

COMPARING TEXTBOOK DESCRIPTIONS OF CONFLICT

Conflict Name	Conflict Name	Conflict Name	Conflict Name
Parties to Conflict	Parties to Conflict	Parties to Conflict	Parties to Conflict
Conflict Words	Conflict Words	Conflict Words	Conflict Words
Important? A war?	Important? A war?	Important? A war?	Important? A war?

DISCUSSIONS OF PEACE IN OUR TEXTBOOK
(an example is provided)

Time Period/ Date	Page # in book	Topic	What the textbook says	Other words used to indicate peace
27 BC - 250 CE	23	<i>Roman Empire at its height</i>	<i>"Because Rome was strong, the empire was peaceful and stable."</i>	<i>stable, well-fed, strong, wealthy</i>