

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

Name _____

Student Worksheet #1

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. _____
