



# Navigating Controversial Issues in Social Studies Classrooms

Helping teachers make good decisions regarding content that some may perceive as controversial.



## ★ BPS Policy-2240

The Board will permit the introduction and proper educational use of controversial issues provided that their use in the instructional program:

- is related to the instructional goals of the course of study and level of maturity of the students;
- does not tend to indoctrinate or persuade students to a particular point of view;
- encourages open-mindedness and is conducted in a spirit of scholarly inquiry.

Read the entire policy [here](#)

## ★ Best practices for successful classroom implementation

### DO

1. UNDERSTAND YOUR STANDARDS
2. Watch your sources, use primary and district approved materials when possible
3. Make your daily objectives clearly visible and well known to all students
4. Ensure you have developed positive relationships- be aware of diverse experiences
5. Ensure you have balanced perspectives in your materials
6. Acknowledge vocabulary may be evolving and some content vocabulary may not be as common now for certain reasons
7. Communicate effectively with parents
8. Touch base and run through plans with your administrators
9. Review content thoroughly before sharing-- Be prepared

10. Think about context – what would someone think if they saw an assignment/notebook/handout out of the context of your classroom walls (a simple change here would be things like including instructions or having students write questions and answers to something instead of just answers...etc.)
11. Provide context and warn students of any sensitive materials
12. Be aware of your time--leave time at the end of the period/lesson, even if not finished, to unpack student thoughts, feelings, & questions
13. Anticipate student questions and how you might respond
14. Provide structure to controversial conversations
15. Have a plan for students who are absent for how they will receive material



## **DON'T**

1. Wait until the last moment to review your resources/ materials
2. Leave any portion as a sub plan
3. Plan these lessons during an abnormal day/schedule (i.e. only half your students will be in class because of a field trip)
4. Split the lesson in a way where only one side is covered during a class period
5. Offer your personal opinion
6. Let one viewpoint dominate the conversation
7. Downplay the severity of the content (as developmentally appropriate)
8. Be afraid to push spontaneous conversations to a later day to allow for more preparation or to redirect conversations entirely

**“The real process of education should be the process of learning to think through the application of real problems”**

**-John Dewey**

**Helpful Links** - Listed below are several helpful links that support the facilitation of conversations that have the potential to become controversial. Keep in mind that there are several kinds of activities (verbal and non-verbal) that allow each student freedom of expression.

- **Ad Fontes Interactive Media Bias Chart** - Charts like these can be helpful in ensuring a variety in sources [Ad Fontes Interactive Media Bias Chart](#)
- **Civics in Real Life**- Concise resources to explore civics concepts connected to current events- [Florida Joint Center for Citizenship](#)
- **EagleEyeCitizen** - Critical Thinking about Primary Sources - [Eagle Eye Citizen](#)
- **All Sides** - Analyzing News and Media - [AllSides](#)
- **NewsELA** - Articles and Current Events - [Newsela](#)
- **ProCon** - For multiple perspectives on issues - [ProCon.org: Homepage](#)
- **Political Party Platforms** -
  - **Democrats** - [2020 Democratic Party Platform](#)
  - **Republicans** - [2016 Republican Party Platform \(not updated in 2020\)](#)
  - **Ballotpedia** - [Ballotpedia.org \(Platform Comparison\)](#)

**Possible Activities and Planning Guides** - Students need resources and training on “How” to conduct civil conversations in class. Below are some links that allow students to interact with one another, identify and remove biases, and open up to new concepts as they learn how to phrase questions and synthesize new ideas together as a class.

- **Standards for Literacy in History/ Social Studies**
  - **Grade 7 & 8** - [7/8 LAFS Standards & Resources for Literacy in History/ Social Studies](#)
  - **Grade 9 &10** - [9/10 LAFS Literacy Standards & Resources in History/ Social Studies](#)
  - **Grade 11 & 12** - [11/12 LAFS Literacy Standards & Resources in History/ Social Studies](#)
- **Academic Language Scripts** - Communication language for students - [Academic Language](#)
- **Civic Online Reasoning** - Analyzing Sources “Skills” - [Civic Online Reasoning](#)
- **Philosophical Chairs** - Rules of Engagement - [Philosophical Chairs Rules of Engagement.doc](#)
- **Costas Question Stems** - [Costa Question Stems.pdf](#)
- **Civil Conversations Framework**- [Civil Conversations Framework.pdf](#)
- **Expectations for “Healthy Discomfort”**- [Expectations for Healthy Discomfort.pdf](#)
- **Four Cs of Group Work** - Communication, Collaboration, Courtesy, Consensus [The 4C's of Group Work.pdf](#)

[Helping Stakeholders Understand Instructional Content & Material Infographic](#)