



## Lesson Plan Template for Dilemma Discussions

Developed by Ziquan Zhan

Want to turn real world dilemmas into powerful classroom discussions that build critical thinking and values? This template provides a repeatable, step-by-step structure to guide students from gut reactions to reasoned judgment. It's designed for you to adapt quickly, perfect for weekly current events or ethics talks.

### Student Learning Objectives

By the end of a session using this template, students will be able to:

- Critically evaluate the credibility of different information sources.
- Engage in constructive dialogue to build consensus through reasoning.
- Articulate the personal and group values that influence their judgments.
- Formulate a transferable life principle from the discussion.

### Age-Appropriateness and Scaffolding

This template is applicable for **grades 1-12** and should be scaffolded by topic complexity and discussion depth.

- **Lower Grades (1-5):** Use concrete, immediate scenarios (e.g., "Should we have a rule about sharing playground equipment?", "A classmate is being left out of a game."). Information "pieces" can be simple pictures, short sentences, or role-play prompts.
- **Middle Grades (6-8):** Explore community or school-wide issues (e.g., "Should our school have a later start time?", "How do we address online rumor-spreading among peers?"). Introduce more varied source types (e.g., a poll result, a quote from an expert).
- **High School (9-12):** Tackle complex societal or ethical dilemmas (e.g., "Balancing free speech with hate speech online.", "Ethical considerations in AI development."). Students can analyze and rank more detailed primary or secondary sources.

### Tips for Selecting Your Topic

A great topic for this activity is:

- **Real & Relevant:** Connected to students' lives (school, community, news).
- **Contentious with Nuance:** Has multiple valid perspectives, no single right answer.
- **Concrete:** Can be broken down into specific "pieces" of information or arguments for students to evaluate (e.g., a news excerpt, a survey data point, a personal account).
- **Examples:** "Should our school implement a smartphone ban?" "How should we respond to a case of suspected theft in the classroom?"
- Some resources you might consider referencing are:
  - <https://wqed.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/above-the-noise-collection/>
  - <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/>
  - <https://studentreportinglabs.org/youth-reporting>



## Lesson Content: Your Fill-in-the-Blank Checklist

Follow this backward design sequence to build your lesson in minutes.

### 1. Define the End Goal: What should students take away?

*Fill in the desired attitude or skill, e.g., "Become discerning information consumers," or "Practice presumption of goodwill in conflicts."*

### 2. Choose the Dilemma: What real scenario embodies this goal?

*Fill in the specific scenario, e.g., "Debate on banning TikTok based on mixed research reports."*

### 3. Prepare the Materials: What will students rank?

*Fill in 5-7 short, conflicting "information pieces" (e.g., quotes, data points, anecdotes) related to your dilemma.*

### 4. Activity Flow

- **Individual Ranking (Activate):** "Rank these pieces from most to least important/credible to you. Go with your gut."
- **Group Consensus (Refine):** "In small groups, debate to create **one** shared ranking. **Rule: No voting.** You must persuade each other. Then, name 2-3 'Golden Criteria' your group used (e.g., 'We trusted peer experience over official statements')."
- **Whole-Class Reflection (Examine):** Facilitate a discussion. Ask questions about the thinking process, not the answer.
  - Sample Questions: "How did we define 'credible'?" "Were two 'eyewitness accounts' the same type of evidence?" "What if we started by assuming bad intent vs. good intent?"
- **Value Anchoring (Takeaway):** Co-create a life principle with the class.
  - \* Prompt: "Based on today's talk, let's agree on a guiding principle like: 'Be a \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_.'"
  - \* Example: "Be an evidence-first collaborator: When problems arise, communicate based on facts before blaming."

Access sample activities/lesson plan here:

<https://contentconnection.org/resource/detective-the-great-sketchbook-mystery-lesson-plan/>

<https://contentconnection.org/resource/phone-policy-lesson-plan/>