

Students will learn about gangs and the theory of groupthink

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Title – Do Something about... School Violence Unit

Day 5: Groupthink

By – Do Something, Inc. / www.dosomething.org

Primary Subject – Social Studies

Secondary Subjects – Other

Grade Level – 9-12

Do Something about...
School Violence
10-Day Unit

The following lesson is the fifth lesson of a 10-day School Violence Unit from Do Something, Inc. Other lessons in this unit are as follows:

Day 1: Bullying

Students will be introduced to the unit and learn the definition of bullying

Day 2: What's life like in my shoes?

Students will learn about bullying in the news and take on the perspective of someone being bullied.

Day 3: Mean Girls

Students will explore the differences and similarities of female and male violence.

Day 4: School Zones

Students will talk about safety in their own school.

Day 5: Groupthink (See the lesson below)

Students will learn about gangs and the theory of groupthink.

Day 6: Stand Up!

Students will learn about diffusion of responsibility and discuss how they should play a role in protecting others.

Day 7: Responsibility

Students will learn about the principal of diffusion of responsibility and techniques that can help them if they are ever a victim of violence.

Day 8: Zero Tolerance

Students will investigate zero tolerance laws and learn about the difficulties schools face when deciding how to handle school violence.

Day 9: Still I Rise

Students will learn about how to find inner strength and cope with bullying.

Day 10: Bully Pulpit

Students will launch an anti-bullying campaign in their school.

More student resources for this cause are at:
www.dosomething.org/causes/school_violence

For more Service-Learning Curricula check out:
www.dosomething.org/oldpeople

Day 5: Groupthink

Goal:

Students will learn about gangs and the theory of groupthink.

Vocabulary:

Groupthink

Process:

1. Tell students to form groups. Allow them to work together to develop a group name, a symbol for their group, and a set of rules their group follows.
2. Once students have finished their group work, have them reflect on the roles they played within the group. Who was the major decision-maker? Was there any disagreement? How was it resolved?
3. Tell students that people act differently in group settings. Sometimes, they find themselves in a situation that they might not be comfortable with, but for the sake of the group, they follow along.
4. Ask students whether they think people are more or less likely to be violent when they are in a group setting. Discuss the students' answers.
5. Introduce the term " **groupthink** " to students. **Groupthink** is a term developed by Irving Janis, a psychologist. It describes a process that happens to groups that cause them to make bad or irrational decisions. In a groupthink situation, members of the group conform their own ideas to create group consensus.
6. Share the following symptoms that are indicative of groupthink (wikipedia.com)
 - "Illusion of invulnerability"
 - "Unquestioned belief in the inherent morality of the group"
 - "Collective rationalization of group's decisions"
 - "Shared stereotypes of outgroup, particularly opponents"
 - "Self-censorship; members withhold criticisms"
 - "Illusion of unanimity"
 - "Direct pressure on dissenters to conform"
 - "Self-appointed "mindguards" protect the group from negative information"
7. Ask students to think about if they have ever seen examples of groupthink occurring in their own lives. Relate groupthink to gang mentality. How does groupthink influence gang behavior?

8. Ask students in pairs to list the reasons why people join gangs. Share these with the class and discuss how a gang is different than just a group of friends.
9. Share some gang information with students:
 - Gangs are usually defined as a “group of individuals who share a common identity and, in current usage, engage in illegal activities. Once an urban problem, street gangs have now infiltrated U.S. communities large and small. Gang experts say at least 21,500 gangs – with more than 731,000 members – are active nationwide.”.
 - Studies that have compared at risk teens with teenagers in gangs show that the latter group is more likely to be involved with violent crimes.
 - Factors that can increase gang involvement are: poverty, divorced families, alcohol and drug abuse, family history of gang involvement, an “us against them” mentality, and previous violent and anti-social behavior.
10. Have students fill out the gang survey to determine if gangs are a problem in their school (<http://www.gwcinc.com/gguide.htm>).
11. Students can then determine what kind of response would be helpful to decrease gang membership in their school. What could the school do? The community?

Additional Activities:

- Have students write and present their own anti-gang rap.
- Ask students to discuss the most violent movies, video games, songs they have heard of seen. Is it ok to expose people to this violence? Should children be able to see this too? Do they think this violence influences their behavior? Why or why not?

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