

STARTING THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS



AGENDA

- Starter
- Quick Toss
- Let It Flow
- Fallout Shelter: Defining the Problem
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

Objectives

Students will discover what makes some decisions harder than others.

Students will learn that decisions are influenced by many factors.

Students will identify and illustrate the steps of the decision making process.

Students will begin the fallout shelter simulation, which allows students to practice the decision making process.

Materials Needed

- A soft ball or a ball of rolled-up socks (Part I)
- Six large pieces of poster board, and six long strips of paper (Part II)
- One manila folder for each group of six or seven students (Part III)

Starter (3 minutes)

Explain to students that today they will begin to study the decision making process. Begin the discussion by asking students to consider all of the decisions they have made during the day so far. Have three volunteers alternate writing student responses on the board so that students can quickly call out answers for about one minute.

Have the volunteers tally the number of decisions made by the class. The number should be large. Point out to students that people make many decisions every day, some easy and some more difficult. Explain that today's lesson will help them learn the process for making a decision, which can make tough decisions easier.

Part I Quick Toss (10 minutes)

Purpose: Students discover what makes some decisions harder than others and learn that decisions are influenced by many factors.

1. Students participate in an activity that requires them to make choices.

Hold the soft ball or the ball of rolled-up socks. Explain that you are going to ask a question and then throw the ball to a student. That student has three seconds to answer the question and throw the ball back to you. You will then repeat the exercise with different questions and different students.

Toss the ball. Begin by asking students to make easy decisions. For example:

- Which show will you watch on television tonight?
- What color would you choose for a new car?

If possible, throw the ball to every student.

2. Students respond to increasingly complex questions.

As the game continues, increase the difficulty of the questions. For example:

- If you found money, what would you do with it?
- If your dog were very ill, would you put it to sleep or spend as much money as possible to cure it?

Then, ask about the process students use to make decisions. For example:

- How did you decide to wear your hair like that?
- How did you choose your after-school job?

3. Students discuss what makes some decisions more difficult than others.

Discuss what students experienced during the game. Ask questions such as the following:

- What made some of the decisions easy? What made some of the decisions more difficult?
- Would it have helped to know what your friends think about the situation? Why?
- If you had more information, would the choice have been easier? What kind of information would you like to have had?

Lead students to the understanding that consequences usually make decisions difficult. Often, the more significant the consequences, the more difficult the decision.

Ask students to suggest some other factors that can influence the decisions they make. (Students might respond: peer pressure, personal beliefs, the opinions of someone they respect.) Elicit from them that such factors affect the choices they make.

Part II Let It Flow (10 minutes)

Purpose: Students identify the steps of the decision making process and create a flowchart to illustrate the process.

1. Students identify the steps of the decision making process.

Ask students to think about what they have learned regarding the factors they consider when making a decision (e.g., consequences, peer influence, personal beliefs). Have them suggest the steps they think people should take when making an important decision. Once students have created a list, have them put the steps in order. The final list should resemble the following:

1. Define the issue.
2. Gather information.
3. Develop alternatives.
4. Analyze the consequences.
5. Make the decision.
6. Consider feedback and evaluate.

Point out that the final step—consider feedback and evaluate—may result in returning to the first step to rework the decision. Decision making can be a recursive process. Sometimes, one must return to the beginning of the process or repeat a step several times.

2. Students create a flowchart that shows the decision making process.

Provide the class with the following scenario: the local school board is trying to decide if students at your high school should be required to wear uniforms to school.

Divide the class into six groups. Tell students that each group will illustrate one step of the decision making process regarding the school board's choice. Give each group a large piece of poster paper and a long strip of paper.

Assign each group one step of the decision making process. Tell them to consider and discuss the problem with regard to the step assigned to them. For example, the "gather information" group would discuss how the school board would gather relevant information to help in its decision making. On their poster papers, the groups are to illustrate their assigned steps of the decision making process. They should use the long piece of paper to make an arrow that will be used to connect their steps to the next step.

When students have finished, collect the steps and post them on a bulletin board or wall. Connect all of the steps using the arrows. Review the results to reinforce the steps of the decision making process.

Part III Fallout Shelter: Defining the Problem (30 minutes)

Purpose: Students begin a simulation, which continues throughout this module, and practice the first step of the decision making process (define the issue).

1. Students prepare for a simulation that highlights decision making.

Explain to students that they are now going to begin working through the decision making process, as illustrated in their flowcharts. Explain that the activity will continue over the next few lessons.

Divide the class into groups of six or seven. Give each group a manila folder. Have a member of the group write all the members' names on the folder. Inform students that all group work and notes related to this activity are to be kept in the folders. You will collect them at the end of each session and distribute the folders at the beginning of the next.

Explain the following situation to the groups:

Your group is composed of members of a federal agency in Washington, D.C., that is in charge of running fallout shelters in the far outposts of civilization. Suddenly, World War III breaks out and nuclear bombs begin dropping, destroying places all across the globe. People are heading for whatever fallout shelters are available. You receive a desperate call from one of your stations asking for help.

It seems that 10 people have arrived looking for shelter, but there is only enough space, air, food, and water in the fallout shelter for six people for a period of three months, which is how long they must stay underground before they can safely leave. They realize that if they have to decide among themselves which six should go into the shelter, they are likely to become irrational and begin fighting. So, they have decided to call your department and leave the decision to you. They will abide by your decision.

Explain to students that, as a group, they have to decide which four people will have to be eliminated from the shelter. Impress upon them the following important considerations:

- It is possible that the six people they choose to stay in the shelter might be the only six people left to continue the human race.
- You (the federal agency group) must make the decision—no exceptions.

2. Students begin the simulation by defining the problem.

Explain to students that their responsibility today is to carefully define the problem. Instruct students to take 10 minutes to write a clear definition of the situation, including all the factors they feel are important.

Instruct the groups' members to brainstorm the most important criteria (including core beliefs and values) to consider when making this decision. Have students include any outcomes the group wants. As a prompt, ask, "What qualities are important: intelligence, creativity, kindness, or other qualities?" Allow students 10 minutes to write their answers.

3. Students discuss their group work.

Have each group share its definition with the class. Ask:

- What difficulties did you encounter when your group wrote its definition of the problem?
- Why is it necessary to have a clear definition of a problem when making a decision?

Lead students to the understanding that having a clear definition of the problem helps them to focus on each specific aspect of the problem and helps ensure that they will not be distracted later by things that aren't part of the issue.

Have the groups return their materials to their folders. Collect the folders.

Conclusion *(2 minutes)*

Ask students how often they make decisions. Ask them to explain how good decisions are made. Elicit from students the following key points that were taught in this lesson:

- People make many decisions every day, some more difficult than others.
- Decisions are influenced by many factors, including beliefs and values.
- Following the decision making process results in the best decisions.
- A clear definition of the problem leads to a better understanding of the issue.

Student Assessment

1. What factors can make some decisions more difficult than others?
2. List three factors that influence the decisions you make.
3. List the steps of the decision making process in order.

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Using Quotations

“If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favorable.”

Have students illustrate this quote (perhaps by showing a ship labeled with a decision being buffeted by various winds). Display the drawings or have students explain them in small groups.

Using Technology

Choose a television show with a historic or ecological theme. Pick one example of decision making illustrated in the show. Have students create flowcharts of the example based on the decision making process.

Have students discuss the flowcharts in small groups.

Writing in Your Journal

Have students write about a decision they will have to make in the near future. Students should define the problem and describe why the choice may be difficult to make. Students should choose a topic they can discuss with their classmates.

Ask students to submit a one-sentence description of the problem they've identified. Have the class discuss the types of problems to be solved.

Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

Explain to students that mnemonic devices are techniques for assisting memory. Provide the class with an example of a mnemonic device.

Divide students into groups. Have each group create a mnemonic to help students remember the decision making process (e.g., “Dizzy gators don’t always make choices.”). Have groups share their mnemonic devices with the class.

Homework

Have students track news stories that describe choices to be made by local, state, or national government officials.

Have students keep a log of their stories and write a short paragraph summarizing each decision made, including stated reasons for arriving at decisions as well as hidden agendas.

Additional Resources

Have students research a recent decision made by the president or another political figure.

Have students chart the process that may have been used in making this decision.