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POLITICIANS AND POWER

40-MINUTE ACTIVITY

Introduction

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These resources were produced by The Economist Educational Foundation, an independent charity that was set up by *The Economist* magazine. We combine *The Economist*'s journalistic know-how with teaching expertise, and we specialise in supporting teachers to facilitate high-quality classroom discussions about the news.

About this resource

This resource gives students the opportunity to discuss and make judgements on real examples of politicians' behaviour, leading to ethical questions about justice, democracy, responsibility and power. It complements the National Curriculum for England: KS2-4 Citizenship, including the role and responsibilities of Parliament.

This resource helps to develop the following skills:

SCEPTICISM
Questioning information to find the truth

REASONING
Justifying a viewpoint

SPEAKING UP
Confidently communicating a viewpoint

OPEN-MINDEDNESS
Listening to other viewpoints

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Let us know about any interesting discussions you have!

@Econ_Foundation
#newsthinking #econfoundation #newsliteracy

BEFORE THE SESSION YOU NEED TO HAVE:

- ☐ The *Politician examples*, printed and cut up
- ☐ The *Big questions*, printed and placed around the room
- ☐ A space in which students can move around

10-MINUTE ACTIVITY

Where do you draw the line?

Resources

No resources needed.

Activity instructions

Move all students to a space in the classroom. Draw or mark out a line in the middle of the space. Tell students that the expression "to cross the line" means to do something wrong. Ask them to think of examples of behaviour that they think crosses the line (for example: stealing, fighting, lying). Invite them to physically cross the line and share their example with a partner, and justify why it is wrong.

Next, ask students to be sceptical. Can they give any reasons why their own examples might be accepted in some situations?

Then, ask students to be open-minded. Assign them a different perspective to their own. For example: a religious leader, an elderly person, a young child. See whether they can give new examples, from that person's perspective. Discuss why there might be differences between people and why acceptability may be relative in some cases.

15-MINUTE ACTIVITY

Politician examples

Resources

The *Politician examples*, printed and cut up

Activity instructions

Ask students to stand next to the line. Give some students a *Politician examples* card, one each. Select one student to read their example to the group. Everyone should decide the extent to which they think it "crosses the line". They should show their opinion by moving: the further they move away from the line, the more unacceptable they think the example is. If they think it's acceptable, they do not cross the line.

Ask your students to share their reasons with others standing close by. Invite some students to share their reasons with the class then repeat with the next example.

Afterwards, get students to think about general principles of behaviour by asking each one to complete the following sentence:

> ***"A politician's behaviour is unacceptable if..."***

Work together to formulate a general rule that everyone agrees on.

Politician examples

Boris Johnson

Johnson is the UK Prime Minister. He asked the Queen to prorogue (shut) Parliament for five weeks in Autumn 2019. This was an unusually long time, especially as Britain was due to agree on a Brexit deal by October 31st. Some people said it was an illegal move by the government because it would reduce the amount of time that Parliament had to block a no-deal Brexit.

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John Prescott

Prescott punched a protester in the face in 2001 because the protester threw an egg at him. Prescott was Deputy Prime Minister in a Labour government at the time.

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Chris Huhne

Huhne was a Liberal Democrat MP and the Energy and Climate Change Secretary when he was caught driving over the speed limit. His wife took the blame for him at the time. She accepted the penalty points on her driving licence so that her husband wouldn't be banned from driving. However, when they split up, she revealed the truth.

Photo by Chatham House / CC BY 2.0

Hazel Blears

Blears was a Labour MP and cabinet minister in 2009 when it was uncovered that five years earlier she had lied. Blears was accused of lying so she could avoid paying a property tax that people in the UK have to pay when they sell a second home. Blears also spent £4,874 of the government's money on furniture, £913 on a new TV and £400 a month on groceries.

Photo by Steve Punter / CC BY 2.0

Politician examples

Justin Trudeau

The Prime Minister of Canada wore "brownface" makeup to a fancy-dress party at the school where he taught. He was at an "Arabian Nights" themed gala. He wore a turban and robes with his face, neck and hands completely darkened. This happened in 2001 but the public found out about it during a general election campaign in 2019.

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Saad Hariri

Hariri is a former Prime Minister of Lebanon. He gave more than $16 million to a South African model who said they had a romantic relationship. Hariri was not in office when he sent the money and the transfer does not appear to have violated any Lebanese or South African laws.

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Donald Trump

Trump is the President of the United States of America, and is accused of blocking aid (help) to Ukraine unless it announced an investigation into Hunter Biden, the son of Trump's political rival. Some people said Trump did this to gain an advantage over his rival in the 2020 presidential election.

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Silvio Berlusconi

Berlusconi is a former Prime Minister of Italy. He made inappropriate comments throughout his political career. After the worst earthquake Italy had seen in three decades, Berlusconi said that the people who had been left homeless should see their experience as a camping weekend. At the time, 260 people were known to have died.

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15-MINUTE ACTIVITY

The big questions

Resources

The *Big questions*, printed and placed around the room

Activity instructions

Ask students to choose one of the *Big questions* placed around the room, and stand next to it. Aim for roughly equal numbers at each question. Group members should discuss the question, doing their best to build on each other's thoughts. Give each group three minutes of discussion time before they switch to another question and repeat.

Afterwards, ask students to report on one of their discussions. Challenge students to only say what they heard in the discussion, rather than what they contributed. Ask for their opinions on what they heard, and push them to give reasons.

BIG QUESTION

Is it fair to expect better behaviour from politicians than from everyone else?

BIG QUESTION

Does power lead to corruption?

BIG QUESTION

When you have voted for someone, should you accept whatever they do once they are in power?

BIG QUESTION

When should voters judge politicians for what they did in the past?

BIG QUESTION

Does power make bad behaviour unavoidable, more likely, or neither?

BIG QUESTION

Does the poor behaviour of some politicians make us judge them all too harshly?

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Want more news literacy resources?

The Economist Educational Foundation offers a range of programmes to help teachers and students have inspiring, in-depth discussions about current affairs whilst developing their critical thinking skills.

Find out more at **economistfoundation.org**

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Inquiry

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Develop critical thinking, oracy and independence through heaps of practical activities to embed the news within your curriculum

Workshops

Students dive into an issue over the course of a day, exploring a range of perspectives and having their say

Agora 2020

An immersive, one-day event that puts students at the heart of a breaking news story

"I feel more confident now with having challenging discussions with children and allowing them to form their own opinions on matters."

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