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MANY COLORS

Grades: 7 and up

Time: 45 minutes to several weeks, depending upon the amount of research assigned

Materials: For a short version, prepared issue dichotomies with pertinent articles; for a longer version, research materials, such as books, the Internet, periodicals, etc.

Relevant Subjects: Social Studies, History, Media Studies, Journalism, and Language Arts

1. Choose an issue or current conflict that the media and politicians have presented in essentially black and white terms. For example:

- going to war in Iraq in 2003
- loggers versus Spotted owls
- passing NAFTA and GATT in the 1990s
- any current conflict, issue, or event

2. Divide the class into four groups representing the two opposing interests (groups 1 and 2), problem solvers (group 3) and citizen choice-makers (group 4).

3. Have groups 1 and 2 research the issue from their group's assigned perspective. For a short version, have the students read articles that you provide. For a longer version, have groups 1 and 2 search out information as homework and prepare a presentation to the class. Have the group select one person to present its perspective. Students may use photographs, video footage, podcasts, interviews, personal stories, facts, news reports, statistics – in essence anything that will bolster the group's case.

4. Toss a coin to determine who will go first, and then have each group present its case in turn. Invite members of groups 3 and 4, the problem solvers and citizen choice-makers, to ask any questions of groups 1 and 2.

5. During the next phase of the activity, have group 3, the problem solvers, either suggest alternative solutions (in the short version) or conduct their own research into solutions to the conflict (the longer version). After gathering information, have the problem solvers brainstorm solutions to the problem. Encourage group 3 to come up with their own ideas, to think creatively, and to consider both large, systemic changes and small, incremental ones. Ask group 3 to anticipate questions and concerns about

their ideas and to prepare well thought-out responses. Have group 3 select someone to present its suggestions to the class.

6. When the problem solvers present their suggestions, encourage members of groups 1, 2 and 4 to ask questions about the implementation of the ideas presented by group 3. Invite groups 1 and 2 to respond to the suggested solutions and to express their thoughts and feelings about the answers group 3 has generated.

7. Having listened to groups 1, 2 and 3, group 4 should come up with all the ways in which they as individuals and citizen choice-makers can help implement the ideas presented by group 3. These ideas can include writing an op-ed, contacting their legislators, using their money to cast a personal “vote,” organizing educational initiatives – in short, activism and advocacy of all kinds. Have members of group 4 implement some of these ideas as their assignment. Ask group 4 to choose someone to present their citizen actions to the class. Again, invite groups 1 and 2 to respond and express their thoughts and feelings about the ideas presented by group 4.

8. Discuss the ways in which a problem can be solved when people come together, listen to each other, and envision creative solutions to conflicts. Invite students to consider how this approach could be applied to other problems.

Activity from *The Power and Promise of Humane Education*