

Of Tolerance

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This brief paper grows out of a workshop that I conducted on 5 November 1996 at Seabrook Elementary School, Fayetteville, North Carolina, and includes contributions from Fourth Grade Schoolteachers, Tina Cashwell, Martha Faircloth, and Mona McFadyen. We used materials that I adapted from Lipman (1996) as models and developed what follows. We begin with a discussion plan on *uses and senses of tolerance*, and then turn to *What Tolerance Means to Me*, which is intended to combine creative and critical thinking.

The discussion plan can be used in a number of ways. One way is to present students with the list of uses and move to the exercise on senses. Another would be to begin with the senses and a few examples of uses, and then ask the students to think of more examples. Another approach is to treat both as background information for the teacher, and engage students in a discussion of tolerance leading to a development by the students of a list of uses and senses, followed by the matching and writing exercises. Alternatively, teachers could begin with the writing exercise and then use exercises on uses and senses as steps in the rewriting and development processes. Obviously, these approaches can be “mixed and matched” to suit particular needs and circumstances. We begin then with a discussion plan.

DISCUSSION PLAN: USES OF ‘TOLERANCE’

1. Mr. Jones taught his children to tolerate people with different ideas.
2. If people were more tolerant it would be a happier world.
3. Tolerance is a key to success.
4. If freedom is to succeed, we must have tolerance.
5. The mechanic set the engine valves to a tolerance of one millimeter.
6. Tolerance is an expression of love.
7. Tolerance requires responsibility.
8. Suzi said she could tolerate laziness, but not sloth.
9. My tolerance for noise is limited.
10. The speed limit is 55 MPH. No tolerance.
11. We should be tolerant of others’ beliefs and opinions.
12. Tolerance is a learned discipline.
13. Tolerance is strength.
14. Tolerance is accepting others for what they are.
15. Tolerance is at different levels for different people.
16. He is very different at times. Can I tolerate his differences?
17. We were able to tolerate the day of Halloween.
18. Being able to tolerate people is an important life-long skill. As a teacher, can I tolerate certain behaviors?
19. Tolerance is the key when standing in line at Disney World.
20. I can no longer tolerate this pain.
21. You must be tolerant of others’ differences.

22. She is a wonderful mother. She is very tolerant with her children. She has a high tolerance for noise.
23. Mom will not tolerate D's or F's on my report card.
24. I will not tolerate such behavior in my classroom.
25. She became ill because her tolerance was low.
26. I have a low tolerance for painkillers.
27. Tolerance must be learned.
28. Tolerance is a strength.
29. My body is not tolerant without my morning caffeine.
30. Tolerance is reciprocal.
31. Tolerance is essential to democracy.

As we can see from the uses above 'tolerance,' 'tolerate,' and 'tolerant' have several senses. From the list below, can you match the senses with the uses above? (Some of the uses match with more than one sense.)

SENSES OF 'TOLERANCE'

- a. a fair and objective attitude
- b. undogmatic
- c. endurance, forbearance (without repugnance)
- d. a permissible range of variance
- e. without hindrance allowing for beliefs, attitudes, practices, and opinions that differ from one's own
- f. allowance by government
- g. acceptance, to accept
- h. ability to cope with
- i. to be patient
- j. ability to understand
- k. to have a physical power

WHAT TOLERANCE MEANS TO ME

As an exercise to follow the discussion plan we can combine critical and creative thinking skills by asking students to write a paragraph on *What Tolerance Means to Me*. Here are some examples that may be used as prompts for this exercise:

I. Tolerance is the wonderful ability to accept others regardless of their physical, mental or emotional differences. Tolerance is named Mom. My mom can take care of children, cook, clean, and be the perfect grandmother. It makes no difference how active or inactive the children are. Her love for them and her own children allows her to tolerate many imperfections. Mom is tolerance.

II. Tolerance means being able to adjust and accept many of life's unpleasant things. I find that my tolerance level is good when it comes to dealing with my classmates. I can tolerate certain behaviors when I know my classmate has no control, like when my classmate, Sally, has an epileptic seizure. But when Billy puts his gum under the desk, he could control himself better, so I don't tolerate that. Being able to tolerate other people in certain situations is something I feel is a strength, and will make life less stressful.

III. Tolerance is *Star Trek*. One reason *Star Trek* is so popular is that it gives us a vision of a happier future. They still have their problems, but most of the life forms in *Star Trek* are happier than us because they are more tolerant than us. The various races, species, beliefs, customs, rituals, etc. are tolerated; and mostly they manage to be tolerant. This means that they don't have the sorts of unhappy conflicts that we seem to have all the time: Hutus and Tutsies; Jews, Muslims, Christians, Hindus; Croats and Serbs; various races; and so on. The tolerance on *Star Trek* seems to have a lot to do with respecting others, but I've noticed also that it has to do with not trying to "convert" others. The life forms leave each other at peace in that way too. In fact, conflict

and suffering only seem to come in where one group tries to convert or conquer another. I wonder if *Star Trek* is a vision of our future.

IV. Tolerance is a word I wish more people had in their vocabularies. The world would be a happier place if everyone were more tolerant of each other. Historical events would have had happier outcomes. Countries and cultures would have been redefined. If history had been more tolerant, wouldn't the world be a better place in which to live? If Christians, Jews, and Muslims had been more tolerant, think of all the death and suffering that would not have happened. Think what could happen now.

Our approach is first to use the analytical discussion plan on uses and senses to broaden students' conceptions of tolerance and to develop their abilities to give and distinguish meanings, and then to move to writing. By following through with the rewriting of multiple drafts, students can develop both thinking skills and writing skills.

REFERENCE

Lipman, Matthew, "Philosophical Discussion Plans and Exercises," *Analytic Teaching*.

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