

**Wall to Peace: Deconstructing Divisions Among People and Cultures**  
**High School – Contemporary World History; U.S. History; American Civics/Government**

**Elaborated Lesson Focus:**

The purpose of this activity is for students to explore the impact of different behaviors and to discuss how these behaviors can bolster or hinder the presence of peace in a society, through mediated debate and small group work. Students examine symbolic and figurative walls to peace: built with “blocks” that divide people and cultures.

**Performance Tasks:**

- Students will analyze literary quotes and relate them to their own experience
- Students will learn and discuss new vocabulary that pertains to conflict and conflict resolution
- Students will work in small groups to debate various issues and practice conflict resolution
- Students will deconstruct which behaviors make for a productive debate and which behaviors undermine positive communication

**Techniques and Skills:**

Vocabulary building, reading comprehension, large group discussion, small group work, critical and analytical thinking, public speaking, supporting ideas with examples, creative writing, responsive writing, and literary analysis.

**Requirements:**

*Materials:*

- Chalkboard and chalk, or chart paper and markers
- *Student Handouts: Blocks to Peace, Stepping Stones to Peace, Mending Wall*

*Time:*

- 45 minutes

**Lesson Preparation:**

- Prepare copies of *Student Handouts* for distribution
- Prepare (copy and cut) “word cards” for debate game in advance (OPTIONAL)

**Procedures:**

1. Write the following prompt on the chalkboard or on chart paper. Allow 10 minutes for students to respond in their journals or notebooks.  

*“Good fences make good neighbors.”*
2. Ask the class what they think this phrase means. What do you think makes a better neighbor—a fence or no fence? How does a “wall”—literal or figurative—make for a good neighbor or friend? How might it make for a bad neighbor or friend? What makes a better neighbor (or friend): good boundaries or good communication? Why?
3. Ask for volunteers to share their freewrite responses. Allow 10 minutes for students to share what they wrote.
4. Ask the class when boundaries are most important. Explain that physical boundaries are sometimes (but not always) erected when people have stopped respecting each other or listening to each other, or when people feel threatened (by perceived or actual threats). Use

the example of two neighbors. When might two neighbors feel the need to build a picket fence between their properties? What environment would encourage them to NOT build a wall or fence?

5. Write the following quote underneath the first one.

*“Don’t burn your bridges.”*

6. Ask the class what they think this quote means. Elicit and chart student responses on the chalkboard or chart paper.
7. Ask the class when people might choose to erect a bridge—literally? Why are bridges built? What do they do?
8. Ask how fences and bridges might symbolize war and peace, or miscommunication and communication, or hate and love.
9. Suggest that when people (or groups of people) stop listening to each other, and stop treating each other with respect, miscommunication can occur. Miscommunication can lead to frustration and a feeling of not being respected, which, in turn leads to conflict and aggression. Likewise, if miscommunication is recognized and stopped, conflict might be resolved peacefully.

10. Write the following terms on the chalkboard or on chart paper:

**BLOCKS TO PEACE**

- GREED
- DISRESPECT
- CENSORSHIP
- PREJUDICE
- FEAR
- NOT LISTENING
- PEER PRESSURE
- RIVALRY
- INDIFFERENCE
- OPPRESSION

**STEPPING STONES TO PEACE**

- GENEROSITY
- RESPECT
- FREE SPEECH
- TOLERANCE
- SECURITY
- COMMUNICATION
- CONFIDENCE
- COOPERATION
- COMPASSION
- CIVIL RIGHTS

11. Allow 20 minutes to elicit definitions and examples from the class for each of the terms on the board. Record their responses next to each term. Leave the list and the definitions on the board for reference throughout the following activity.
12. Ask the class why the first list might be titled “Blocks to Peace,” and, in turn, why the second list would be titled “Stepping Stones to Peace.” Discuss the metaphor of a wall built with blocks and the metaphor of a bridge built with stepping stones, and relate those two symbols to the words listed under each.
13. Explain that the class is now going to participate in an activity that illustrates how communication can break down, and how conflict can occur because of that breakdown in communication. It also illustrates how to identify breaks in communication before they devolve into conflict.
14. Divide the class into four groups and arrange the groups against all four walls of the classroom.

15. Give each “team” copies of *Student Handout: Blocks to Peace* and *Student Handout: Steeping Stones to Peace*. Instruct students to cut out the cards along the double lines so that each team has a set of 20 cards, with one word on each.

*Note:* Alternatively the handouts can be cut into cards before class and four prepared sets can be distributed; one set to each team.

16. Explain to the class that they are now going to have short debates on various subjects. Tell the class that if, during their debate, a student on one of the teams exhibits one of the words from the list “Blocks to Peace” from the board, one of the other teams can respond by “throwing down” the corresponding card to stop the argument. Then the team that threw down the card must argue the same point, while simultaneously illustrating a term from the “Steeping Stones to Peace” list. If they are successful in both arguing their point AND illustrating the term, the team collects both cards and that team receives a point. If they are unable to illustrate the term, another team has the opportunity to try. Whichever team is successful in arguing their point AND illustrating a term from the “Steeping Stones to Peace” list picks up both cards.

17. The winning team is the team with the most cards and/or points at the end of the activity.

*Note:* It is crucial that one adult in the room serves as the mediator for this activity, ensuring that a constructive and organized debate format is followed, that each team has an opportunity to argue their point, settling disputes, etc.

**Example:** The class is debating the validity of the phrase “Good Fences Make Good Neighbors.” A member of Team I says: “Fences are important because they mark boundaries.” A member of Team II replies: “That’s a dumb thing to say.” Because this statement illustrates one of the “Blocks to Peace” (disrespect), a member of any of the other teams can then stop the debate and throw down the “Disrespect” card. Whoever “threw” the Disrespect card must then explain why that card was thrown (“Tasha disrespected Paolo by calling him dumb.”) then that student, or a member of his/her same team, must provide an argument that refutes the statement “Fences are important because they mark boundaries” while illustrating one of the terms from “Steeping Stones to Peace,” such as: “When boundaries are marked with fences or walls, it makes it harder for people on each side to cooperate.” They would then throw the “Cooperation” card on top of the “Disrespect” card, and collect both cards. That team would earn one point.

Some suggested topics for debate might be:

- Good fences make good neighbors.
- It should be a law that everyone has to drive a hybrid car.
- Boys are better at sports than girls.
- Prayer should be allowed in public school.
- The legal drinking/voting age should be 16.
- Women should be eligible for the draft.
- If we don’t learn about history, we are doomed to repeat it.
- There is (racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, sexism) in the U.S. today.
- Cigarettes should be taxed at 200% and that money should be used for cancer research.
- Ratings should be removed from all movies so that no child is banned from any movie.
- Gays should be allowed to marry.

*Note:* Alternatively students can suggest debate topics, or debate topics can be gleaned from a current newspaper or news broadcast.

18. For homework, distribute *Student Handout: Mending Wall*. Instruct students to complete Page 2 of the handout, based on a critical reading of the poem on Page 1. Alternatively the class can read the poem and discuss it together as an extension activity.

*Extension Activities and Ideas for Further Learning*

- Instruct students to research current events—or events in history—where a wall or fence was constructed as a boundary. Has this “fence” made “good neighbors?” What has the fence accomplished? What problems has it created? What might have been a better solution? Possible topics might be:
  - The Berlin Wall
  - The wall erected between Israel and the Palestinian Territories
  - Great Wall of China
  - The San Diego Border Fence
  - Warsaw Ghetto wall
  - Figurative walls, such as voting/school district lines within cities, or “good neighborhoods vs. bad neighborhoods”
  - The gates in “gated communities”
- As a service learning activity, instruct students to research a nonprofit organization whose work exemplifies the building of bridges, and explain how their work is relevant to this subject. Students might work individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Allow class time during the following week for students to present their organization to the class. For extra credit, students can volunteer for the organization’s local branch, or provide other support to the organization, or the organization’s mission. Students can identify nonprofits on their own, or a list can be provided. Some relevant nonprofits might be: Habitat for Humanity, The Make It Right Foundation, Pen Pals for Soldiers, Kaboom, Do Something, City Year, The Bridge School, Facing History and Ourselves, Operation Respect, Seeds of Peace.
- Create a class “Bridge of Peace.” Have each student create their own “stone” to add to the bridge. “Stones” might be 8 ½" x 11" pieces of paper, decorated shoe boxes, small pieces of cardboard or wood, collected stones or pebbles. Students should decorate their “stone” to represent an image of one of the terms in the “Stepping Stones to Peace” list, or they can add their own term. Then arrange their work in the shape of a bridge on a bulletin board or display case. Create a permanent bridge by gluing the blocks or mounting the paper “stones” on foam core. Display the bridge in the school lobby to raise awareness about conflict resolution with the entire student body or donate it to a local organization.

Directions: Cut along the double lines to make 10 cards.

**GREED**

**DISRESPECT**

**CENSORSHIP**

**PREJUDICE**

**FEAR**

**NOT  
LISTENING**

**PEER  
PRESSURE**

**RIVALRY**

**INDIFFERENCE**

**OPPRESSION**

*Directions:* Cut along the double lines to make 10 cards.

---

**GENEROSITY**

**RESPECT**

**FREE SPEECH**

**TOLERANCE**

**SECURITY**

**COMMUNICATION**

**CONFIDENCE**

**COOPERATION**

**COMPASSION**

**CIVIL RIGHTS**

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.  
The work of hunters is another thing:  
I have come after them and made repair  
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,  
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,  
No one has seen them made or heard them made,  
But at spring mending-time we find them there.  
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.  
We keep the wall between us as we go.  
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls  
We have to use a spell to make them balance:  
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'  
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.  
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,  
One on a side. It comes to little more:  
There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'  
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
If I could put a notion in his head:  
'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it  
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offense.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,  
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
He said it for himself. I see him there  
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
He will not go behind his father's saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well  
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

From *The Poetry of Robert Frost* by Robert Frost, edited by Edward Connery Lathem. Copyright ©1916, 1923, 1928, 1930, 1934, 1939, 1947, 1949, © 1969 by Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc. Copyright 1936, 1942, 1944, 1945, 1947, 1948, 1951, 1953, 1954, © 1956, 1958, 1959, 1961, 1962 by Robert Frost. Copyright © 1962, 1967, 1970 by Leslie Frost Ballantine.

*Directions:* Answer the following questions based on the poem, *Mending Wall*, by Robert Frost. Use a separate piece of paper for your answers.

---

### **Part I: Reading Comprehension**

1. Who is the speaker in this poem? What is his relationship to the wall?
2. Why do you think the poem is called *Mending Wall* and not *Mending the Wall* or simply *Walls*?
3. The poem begins with an observation: “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.” Why does the speaker say this? What specific observations does the speaker share as the poem continues to support this statement? Explain.
4. What kind of a wall is in the poem? How do you know? Support your answer with specific references to the poem.
5. What “outdoor game” does the speaker and his neighbor play?
6. Does the speaker feel like the wall is necessary or not? Support your answer with specific references to the poem.
7. Does the speaker think that “good fences make good neighbors” or “something there is that doesn’t love a wall?” Support your answer with specific references to the poem.

### **Part II: Literary Analysis**

1. Explore the element of humor and pretend in the poem. How does the speaker reveal a sense of humor? Why might this be important to the meaning of the poem? Support your response with references to the poem.
2. Write a paragraph on the importance of symbolism in this poem. Explore the symbols of the hunter, the wall, the elves, and the stones. What other symbols add meaning to this poem?
3. At the end of the poem, the speaker observes that his neighbor seems to “move in darkness.” Respond to this observation and analyze its importance within the larger meanings in the poem.

### **Part III: Personal Response**

1. When have you felt ‘walled in’ or ‘walled out’ in your own life? What, or who, caused you to feel this way? How did you cope with this feeling?
2. The speaker in the poem feels like his neighbor is blinded by his father’s beliefs, and unable to think outside of those beliefs. Write about a personal experience you’ve had when you, or someone you know, hasn’t been able to ‘see’ outside the beliefs of their parents or ancestors. How might this ‘blindness’ allow old conflicts to continue? Explain.
3. Write a response poem to *Mending Wall*. Draw from personal experience to create your own tone, voice, setting, and a message or moral.