

Hearing the Opposing Side: A Discussion About Partisanship

Overview

In the aftermath of the violence in Washington, D.C., on January 6, 2020, it is critical to maintain democratic institutions and that students see the value in seeking common ground with others despite partisan differences. In this activity, students are presented with a series of quotes on the idea of partisanship. Each student chooses one of the quotes that resonates with them, and they explain why.

Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Define *partisanship*.
- Choose a statement by a notable writer or politician on the effects of partisanship on governance and on the populace of the United States.
- Reflect on their reasons for their choice.

Materials

[Handout A](#) (Quotes without authors); [Handout B](#) (Quotes with authors)

Procedure

Explain to students that they will be exploring the meaning of partisanship. Ask students what *partisanship* means. Look for the following in their answers:

Partisanship is having a bias for one cause or another. In politics, it usually means having a commitment to one political party (the root of the words *partisan* and *partisanship*) over all others.

Provide each student with [Handout A](#) as an electronic document. Explain that this is a list of quotes related to the subject of partisanship.

Read the quotes to the students, or have different students read the quotes to the class. Answer any questions about vocabulary in the quotes. Invite any other clarifying questions to ensure that all students accurately understand each quote.

Have each student choose one quote that resonates with them. To *resonate*, the quote either rings true for the student, or it seems especially wise, or they just really like the way it expresses an idea to them. Tell them to be prepared to share their reasons why they made their choice. Give students a couple of minutes to choose their quote.

Hold a discussion on which quote resonated with each student and their reasons why. See if there were any quotes that resonated with a majority of students, and if other

quotes did not resonate with any student. You may want to note similarities and differences in students' reasoning as well.

Share [Handout B](#) with students. This handout reveals the identities of the authors of the quotes. Ask students if they are surprised by the author of the quote they chose. Would they change their choice if they knew who said the quote beforehand? If so, why?

Debrief by asking if students think partisanship is ever positive. Have them explain why or why not.

Assessment

Have each student write a paragraph explaining which quote they chose and why.

Note: Constitutional Rights Foundation would love to see what your students say! Please feel free to share their responses: crf@crf-usa.org with subject line "Partisanship."

Choose one quote below that most resonates with you. In other words, choose one that rings true and/or you like the way it is phrased.

1.	“When one side only of a story is heard and often repeated, the human mind becomes impressed with it insensibly.”
2.	“Beware of my partisanship, my mistakes of fact and the distortion inevitably caused by my having seen only one corner of events.”
3.	“There should be no bitterness or hate where the sole thought is the welfare of the United States of America. No man can occupy the office of President without realizing that he is President of all the people.”
4.	“A spirit of harmony will survive in America only if each of us remembers that we share a common destiny; if each of us remembers, when bitterness and self-interest seem to prevail, that we share a common destiny.”
5.	“It’s time for political leaders across the ideological spectrum to realize that, while partisanship is understandable, hyper-partisanship is destructive to our country. We need more visionary leaders who will earnestly strive for bipartisanship and finding policy solutions that can move America forward.”
6.	“Partisanship is our great curse. We too readily assume that everything has two sides and that it is our duty to be on one or the other.”
7.	“Our country, if you read the ‘Federalist Papers,’ is about disagreement. It’s about pitting faction against faction, divided government, checks and balances. The hero in American political tradition is the man who stands up to the mob – not the mob itself.”
8.	“We must have courage to set partisanship aside and embrace the best ideas and solutions no matter which side of the aisle they come from.”

1.	"When one side only of a story is heard and often repeated, the human mind becomes impressed with it insensibly." George Washington, "Letter to Edmund Pendleton" (1795). (Washington was the first president of the United States.)
2.	"Beware of my partisanship, my mistakes of fact and the distortion inevitably caused by my having seen only one corner of events." George Orwell, <i>Homage to Catalonia</i> (1938). (Orwell wrote the novels <i>1984</i> and <i>Animal Farm</i> , and in <i>Homage to Catalonia</i> , he wrote about the Spanish Civil War.)
3.	"There should be no bitterness or hate where the sole thought is the welfare of the United States of America. No man can occupy the office of President without realizing that he is President of all the people." Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1936). (Roosevelt, a Democrat, was the 32 nd president of the United States.)
4.	"A spirit of harmony will survive in America only if each of us remembers that we share a common destiny; if each of us remembers, when bitterness and self-interest seem to prevail, that we share a common destiny." Rep. Barbara Jordan, Keynote address, Democratic National Convention, New York (July 1976). (Jordan, a Democrat from Texas, was the first Southern Black woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.)
5.	"It's time for political leaders across the ideological spectrum to realize that, while partisanship is understandable, hyper-partisanship is destructive to our country. We need more visionary leaders who will earnestly strive for bipartisanship and finding policy solutions that can move America forward." Martin Luther King III, opinion article from <i>USA Today</i> (January 2020). (King is the eldest son of the civil rights movement leader Martin Luther King, Jr.)
6.	"Partisanship is our great curse. We too readily assume that everything has two sides and that it is our duty to be on one or the other." James Harvey Robinson (1863-1936). (Robinson was an American historian and president of the American Historical Association in 1929.)
7.	"Our country, if you read the 'Federalist Papers,' is about disagreement. It's about pitting faction against faction, divided government, checks and balances. The hero in American political tradition is the man who stands up to the mob – not the mob itself." Jonah Goldberg, NPR Interview (2012). (Goldberg is a conservative political columnist and founding editor of National Review Online.)
8.	"We must have courage to set partisanship aside and embrace the best ideas and solutions no matter which side of the aisle they come from." Gov. Charlie Baker, Inaugural Address as Governor of Massachusetts (2015). (Baker, a Republican, became the 72 nd governor of Massachusetts in 2015.)