

Role Play Activity: Having a Conversation about **Military Spending**

Time Needed: 1.5 - 2.5 Hours

Space Needed: A room and chairs

Materials Needed: Would be preferable to have an easel sheet and markers, or a blackboard and chalk, or a computer and a projector; War Resisters League Tax Day Flyer

This Role Play can self-facilitated in a small group or used by a facilitator in an organization, classroom, etc. It is recommended this be used with at least 3 people.

Introduction

The War Resisters League Tax Day Flyer is a great resource with lots of powerful information about the travesty of the cost of past, current, and future wars to our society.

Let's say you visit some family and get in a debate with your conservative Uncle Jeff, and all your information and arguments unexpectedly get stuck in your throat. Suddenly, you realize you're unprepared for the heat of the moment, how to actually argue with a pro-war or pro-military spending proponent.

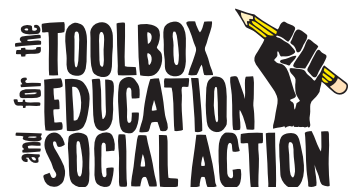
Well, why not get prepared? Below is a guide for facilitating a role play on having a conversation about war spending. This will help you fine tune your ability to speak about the injustice of military spending, expand your knowledge on the subject, and understand the potential talking points of people you might end up debating.

Identifying Your Main Arguments - And Their's - 30 Minutes

1) In a large group, and with the Tax Day flyer in hand, identify what you think are the most important issues regarding the injustices caused by military spending. Ask people to go around the room popcorn style (whoever has an idea speaks up) and say what critical issues and points stand out to them.

Make sure to visually track these ideas, perhaps with a projector, an easel sheet, or a white/black board. Take about 10 - 20 minutes to do this. Tell people they should not get bogged down in discussing/arguing different points. This is simply a brainstorm, and the first rule of brainstorming is not to stop.

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2) Then, make a second list. This list should focus on two things:

A) What you think people who are pro-war and pro-military spending believe. These arguments should range from more liberal arguments, such as defending people's rights, to more conservative ones, like protecting American interests abroad.

B) Direct responses pro-war or pro-military spending proponents might have to your own arguments listed in the previous brainstorm.

Make sure to brainstorm direct responses as thoroughly as you did your own arguments. These are what you are going to practice your role play with. Take about 10 - 20 minutes to do this.

Fishbowl role play: 30 minutes - an hour

Next, set up a fishbowl role play experience. This means create a circle of chairs and then put two in the middle. Start off with two volunteers, and have them take the seats in the middle of the fishbowl. Assign one of them the role of Pro-War and the other of Anti-War. Let them know they will be conversing (whether they make it a civil debate or a heated argument is up to them) and they should use the ideas and points raised in the previous brainstorm.

It's important to start the debate off with a prompt: give each person a role, give the role play a setting, and provide a starting point for the debate. You can either come up with your own, ask people to work together to come up with one (take 5 minutes max, don't get bogged down in this), or use the samples below.

Tell people in the circle that they can switch in for other people—either the anti-war or the pro-war person—at anytime by yelling “FREEZE!” The debate should halt at that moment. The person who yelled freeze should take the place of one of the debaters, who should leave their chair and rejoin the circle, and then the debate continues. As a general rule, people should wait at least 2 minutes before stopping the role play and yelling “FREEZE!” again.

People might be inclined to keep taking the role of the Anti-War person. Encourage people to do both - part of the exercise is understanding where the other side is coming from so that you can be more prepared.

Get the role play started by telling people their setting, their roles, and then reading aloud the prompt.

Sample Setting: News Show Debate (Like CNN, DemocracyNow!, or something fictional)

Sample Roles: Anti-War Advocate from the War Resisters League; Pro-War Local Congressional Representative

Sample Prompt: “Welcome to the show! Today, with Tax Day looming, we're talking about military spending. We're joined by two guests on opposite ends of the spectrum. Those who support military spending posit that a reduction in spending would not only cause a rise in terrorism but would also result in the loss of millions of military and manufacturing jobs. On the other hand, people who propose for a reduction in spending argue that more jobs can be created in other sectors of the economy and would cause a resurgence in the American economy. Guests, what do you think? Congressperson, you're up first.”

If at any point people get stuck, they should refer to the brainstorm of points that the group made together. Or, they can pause, yell “FREEZE!” and call on someone from the circle to take their spot, or help them craft a response.

In general, you should allow the conversation to go where it goes. You might want to have a third person in the circle (whether it's you or another participant) that acts as a facilitator. This facilitator should keep asking points and questions to keep the debate happening. Or, if there's a lull, you could ask participants what additional prompt question could be to keep the conversation going.

Do this activity for as long as you want or people are interested. 30 minutes to an hour would be ideal.

Discussion: What Worked and Lessons Learned (10 - 20 minutes)

Finally, end with a full group conversation about what participants are taking away. Here are a few sample questions you can use for this conversation:

What, to you, were the most powerful anti-military spending arguments?

What were the best ways people responded to the pro-military spending arguments?

What pro-military spending arguments did people have the hardest time addressing?

What are you going to take away from this activity as best ways to have a conversation about stopping out-of-control military spending?

As optional follow up work, or as a follow-up class/group activity, the participants could create talking points/a cheat sheet for debating military spending.

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