

Navigating the Island of Aggression

Lesson 2: The Fires Beneath Aggression

Key Concepts:

- Aggression is a response to underlying distress.
- Recognizing the distress beneath aggression can help us to keep conflicts from escalating, or even to de-escalate conflicts.
- Empathy is a powerful tool for helping us to recognize the distress beneath aggression.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students identify aggression as a distress response.
- Students identify empathy as a powerful tool for helping to recognize and respond to the causes of aggression.

Profile of a Graduate Standards:

- Upper Elementary, Global Citizenship: (4.1) I identify how perspectives affect the way different people react to a situation, event or issue.
- Middle School, Social and Cross Cultural Empathy: (1) I know that our different experiences, cultures, and backgrounds shape how we see the world. (1.1) I appreciate and empathize with how someone else's view of the world and their experiences differ from mine.

Materials:

- Laptop, Chromebook, or tablet
- Whiteboard or chart paper for recording student responses.
- Slides and digital exit ticket, available at [peaceliteracy.org/navigation-curricular-materials](https://www.peaceliteracy.org/navigation-curricular-materials)
- Projector or other way to display a digital slideshow

Vocabulary:

- distress response,
- empathy,
- root cause,
- fires beneath aggression

Lesson Procedure:

1. **Show slide 1.** Title slide
2. **Question** for students:
 - a) We looked at warning aggression in our last class.
What are some things you remember about warning aggression?
3. If students do not express the key concept, review with them:
Warning aggression is designed to frighten away a threat and *avoid* violence.
4. **Show Slide 2:** Fire burning

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Lesson Procedure, continued:

5. Show slide 3: Angry Cat (this slide is animated)

“Today we are going to talk about the causes of aggression. When fires burn, they make a lot of heat. The heat comes from the fire. We can think of aggression as being like heat from a fire. Aggression comes from somewhere. Think of aggression as being like the heat emitted from a fire, and think of the fire as pain and distress. People do not become aggressive because they feel good.”

6. Show slide 4: Key Idea

“This is a key idea in our exploration of aggression. Aggression is a response to distress. It is a reaction to something that is making someone feel pain or discomfort in some way.”

7. Questions for students:

- a. What kinds of fires, what kinds of pain and distress, can make humans aggressive? Let's start by naming some painful emotions that can make humans aggressive. (List student responses on whiteboard or chart paper)
 - b. Do you think it is possible for someone to be aggressive today because of something that happened to them a long time ago?
 - c. Why would that be? Can you give an example?
8. “In the same way we can have scars on our body from something that happened a long time ago, we can have experiences that hurt us so deeply they leave a mark on how we feel about people, about ourselves, or about the world around us. This can sometimes cause us to want to be aggressive without even really knowing why.”

9. Show slide 5: Anger

10. “Because the heat of aggression can overwhelm us, blur our vision, and be very, very difficult to manage, it can cause us to say or do things that we later regret. Later when we are calm, we may even ask ourselves, ‘Why did I do that?!’ ”

11. Show slide 6: Distress: “Many great books and movies have been written about people who are overwhelmed by strong feelings of aggression they don't know how to handle. It is a very common, human experience. By learning to see aggression as a distress response, we can see the fires beneath aggression in ourselves and in others and respond directly to the root causes rather than the symptoms. If you reduce the fire, there is less heat, and the situation is easier to manage.”

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Lesson Procedure, continued:

13. **Show slide 7.** Root cause

14. **Show slide 8.** Finding the root cause

15. **Show slide 9.** Empathy

16. **Question** for students:

a. You may have heard about empathy. Can you give a definition of empathy?

(Click on spacebar to show definition after students respond.) Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person.

b. Give a scenario in which someone might feel empathy.

17. “Empathy is a human ability that has helped us to survive for thousands of years. Our ability to have empathy for each other allowed us to live in groups, and to help each other to live safer, longer lives. Being able to understand each other and relate to each other gave us an edge that helped us to survive and thrive, and to work together to develop civilizations, technologies, and cultures. Empathy is a powerful ability that has helped us in the past, and can help us in the present to see the fires beneath another person’s aggression, or our own aggression. When we learn to see the fires beneath aggression, we can deal with the root cause of the aggression, instead of just reacting to the aggression. In other words, we can deal with the fire instead of just reacting to the heat.”

Digital exit ticket:

1. What is aggression a response to?
2. Name at least 3 fires that can cause people to become aggressive.
3. Give a scenario in which something from the past could make a person aggressive today.
4. How does empathy help us address the root causes of conflicts rather than just the symptoms?

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Activity 2: The Eye of Empathy

Key concepts:

- Empathy is a powerful ability for de-escalating and resolving conflict.
- Empathy is like an eye that can help us to see the root causes of other people's aggression, and our own aggression.
- Seeing the fires beneath aggression can help us to use more effective conflict resolution strategies.

Learning Outcomes:

Students use empathy to see the root causes of aggressive behavior in themselves and others.

Profile of a Graduate Standards:

- Upper Elementary, Global Citizenship: (4.1) I identify how perspectives affect the way different people react to a situation, event or issue.
- Middle School, Social and Cross Cultural Empathy: (1) I know that our different experiences, cultures, and backgrounds shape how we see the world. (1.1) I appreciate and empathize with how someone else's view of the world and their experiences differ from mine.

Materials:

- Ship's Log notebooks and pens/pencils
- Slides and digital exit ticket, available at [.peaceliteracy.org/navigation-curricular-materials](https://www.peaceliteracy.org/navigation-curricular-materials)
- Projector or other way to display a digital slideshow

Vocabulary:

- distress response,
- empathy
- fires beneath aggression
- strategy

Lesson Procedure:

1. **Show slide 1.** Title slide
2. "We talked about empathy as a powerful ability that makes us more effective at conflict resolution. Today we are going to practice using empathy to see the fires beneath different examples of aggression. You can think of empathy as an eye that helps you to see people's actions more clearly, and you can think of it as a muscle in that the more you use it, the stronger it becomes."

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Activity 2: The Eye of Empathy

Lesson Procedure, continued:

3. **Show Slide 2.** Question for students:

- a. Think about a time where you or someone you know reacted to a situation in a way that was aggressive. Think of something you are comfortable sharing as we will work in groups after this. You can even think of an example from a book or a movie.
Write the example in your Ship's Log.
See note to teachers on the next page.

Note to teachers:

Some students may share scenarios where the outcome of using aggression was positive, such as a bully stopped picking on them when they fought back. This is an opportunity to build trust with the students by thanking them for bringing up the example, and assuring them that this conversation will be continued in later lessons. You can explain that this is why we are spending so much time talking about aggression, because it is a complicated issue.

Activity:

1. **Divide** into groups of 2 or 3.
2. **Directions** for students:
“In small groups, share the scenarios you wrote down. Using the Eye of Empathy, imagine what some of the fires might have been that caused the person to act aggressively. Write these fires down. You may think of more than one possible answer.”
3. **Regroup** and share responses.