

Peace Literacy: Two x 90 min lessons on *The Anatomy of Aggression and its Fires* (an abridged version of Peace Literacy Lesson Plan 1)

Prepared by:

Paul K. Chappell

Executive Director, Peace Literacy Institute

Sharyn Clough

Curriculum Coordinator, Peace Literacy Institute, Co-Director Phronesis Lab, Oregon State University

A team of educators at Oregon State University is working with faculty across the US and Canada to **tailor these lessons** further to meet the needs of younger students and/or to other subject areas across the K-12 curriculum and higher education classes. We can also help you identify how the skills highlighted in this lesson plan can be used to meet national, state, and provincial standards for a number of subject areas and age-levels. Contact Sharyn Clough (<mailto:Sharyn.Clough@oregonstate.edu>) for more details.

We are pleased to share this curriculum at no cost and ask only that you cite us, as below, when you use direct quotes or paraphrased passages from this lesson plan:

Paul K. Chappell and Sharyn Clough. 2019. "*Peace Literacy: The Anatomy of Aggression and its Fires, Day 1*," <http://peaceliteracy.org/highschool>

And please send us copies of any materials you produce that are based on this lesson plan so we can put them up on the Peace Literacy website as models for others. Peace Literacy is meant to be shared!

Learning Outcomes for Day 1

(90 min lesson including a 5 min break, video clips, and exercises)

- Exercise Empathy to Recognize Distress in Ourselves
- Identify the Different Kinds of Aggression
- Recognize Aggression as a Distress Response
- Understand the Universal Human Phobia
- Listen with Empathy
- Exercise Empathy to Recognize Distress in Others

Introduce Peace Literacy

Distribute Aggression Worksheet Day 1

10 mins

- Most of us think about peace as an abstract goal that would be nice to have, but it's unclear how to get there.
- What if we instead thought about peace as a set of skills that require training?
- **Write this on the board as you say it:**
 - We can think of training as two things: 1. Learning 2. Practice.

If we want to get better at something, this requires training, in the form of learning and practice.

- **Ask students:** Think of other things in life that require learning and practice to do well.
- **Possible answers:** math, reading, martial arts, drawing, singing, driving, playing a sport or instrument, being good at a video game, etc.
 - Practically everything requires learning and practice to do well!
 - Many athletes, soldiers, and people who do meditation even improve how they breathe through learning and practice.
- Peace, just like everything else, requires training, in the form of learning and practice.
- But rarely do people think of peace this way.
- Many leaders in peace movements over the years, especially Gandhi and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., recognized the importance of training to build peace skills so that we can effectively deal with struggle and conflict.
- Has anyone learned about the Nashville and Birmingham Lunch Counters Campaign during the Civil Rights movement?
 - What kind of training did they do to prepare?
- Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. in turn inspired many others including Paul K. Chappell, a West Point graduate and veteran of the Iraq war.
- **Show 3 min. video** of Chappell talking about our need for what he calls “peace literacy”
You can find the video at the link, below, with English closed-captioning available, or as a file on your shared Google drive:
 - <https://youtu.be/Gyr8UyLEuCE>
 - Watch 1min 22 secs - **stop the video** after “what if people were as well-trained in waging peace as soldiers are in waging war”
 - **After watching the film clip of Chappell, say to students:** Answer this question on your **worksheet:**
 - According to Chappell, why should we not be surprised at the level of violence in the world?
 - **Any questions?**
- We’re going to introduce some peace skills that you can practice and use right here in class, at home with your families, and with your friends.
- And we are going to start by talking about aggression!
- **The main goal** for today is to give you some tools that will help you think about aggression in a new way, and to give you some peace skills you can practice to give you options other than aggression when dealing with struggle and conflict.

5 mins

Empathy Exercise 1 from **worksheet**:

- **Ask students:** What is empathy?
- This next exercise involves having empathy for yourself, being able to connect with and understand yourself so that you are not a stranger to yourself. This requires that you listen to yourself—it's a kind of mindfulness—but we also need to add self-compassion.
- **On your worksheet, write down** 1 or 2 things that are nagging at you in the background, lingering worries or concerns that have nothing directly to do with this class but might affect your learning today (**you won't be asked to share any of this**).
- Bringing these issues to conscious attention is called mindfulness.
- Read over the concerns you've listed—don't make a judgment about whether the concerns are good or bad, reasonable or unreasonable, they are **human** concerns.
- This exercise won't get rid of those intrusive thoughts, but by noticing them they are less likely to have an effect—they won't surprise you.
- And when these concerns come back, which they might, perhaps several times during this class, you can recognize them now as old friends: "oh look, here is some anxiety again."
- This recognition is self-compassion, which means having empathy for yourself.
- It helps you to be kind to yourself - it is not easy being human – cut yourself some slack!
- If this seems difficult, remember that you can gradually get better at this, just like you can gradually get better at anything through learning and practice.
- Practice doing this on your own at the start of each class, and **remember that everyone in the class is having their own struggles!**

5 mins

Introduce the concept of "Aggression as a Distress Response"

- Aggression is like the heat emitted from a fire.
- The fire is a metaphor for the many forms of distress (pain or discomfort) that can cause aggression.
- People don't become aggressive because they feel good.
- The fire can symbolize distress (pain or discomfort) that is psychological or physical.
- We want to focus more on the psychological forms of pain or discomfort because it takes more practice to recognize the psychological forms.
- **Have the students fill in the *worksheet* answering the following 2 questions. Tell them sharing their answers will be optional:**
 - The metaphorical fires (forms of pain or discomfort) that can cause me or other people to feel the heat of aggression include (**list emotions or feelings**):

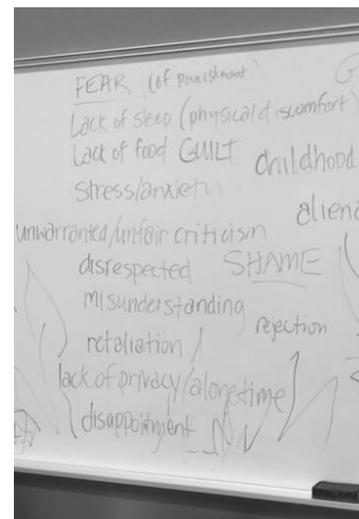
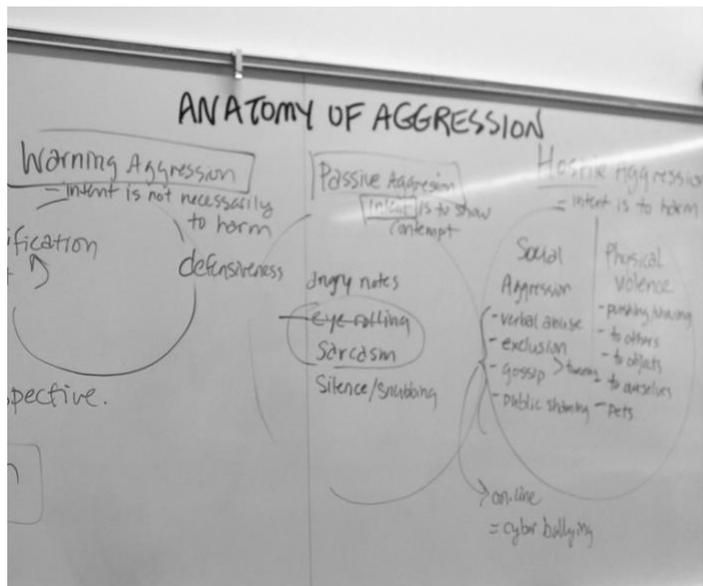
- Some of the ways that I have expressed aggression, or seen other people express aggression, include (**list actions**):

10 mins

- **Ask students:** If you're ok sharing what you wrote, tell us, what forms of pain or discomfort can lead you or other people to behave aggressively?
- **On the far left side of the board, write a list from their answers.**
- When we are feeling aggressive, it is because we are feeling some kind of pain or discomfort.
- In other words, because we are dealing with some kind of **distress**.
- If we train our minds to see **aggression as a distress response**, it can drastically improve how we interact not only with others, but also with ourselves.

Side Note:

- Students sometimes mistake passion for aggression.
- If students give examples of passion (e.g., in sporting contexts or inspirational passionate speeches where voices get loud) tell them we'll distinguish these when we get to the next step (the Anatomy of Aggression).
- If a passionate response doesn't fit under the headings from the Anatomy then we should not consider it aggression.
- **In the middle of the board, draw the three circles from the Anatomy of Aggression on p. 8 (don't label them with headings yet).**
- **Start writing down their answers to the prompt "Some of the ways that I have expressed aggression, or seen other people express aggression, include (list actions)."**
- **As you write their answers, place the answers in one of the three categories of the Anatomy of Aggression (noting that some overlap).**



- **Add the headings in only after you have a few examples from each.**
- *Tell students:* There are three forms of aggression (have them start to fill in **worksheets on p. 3**).
- 1. **The first is Hostile Aggression**, which means **intent to harm**.
 - There are two kinds of Hostile Aggression:
 - The first kind of Hostile Aggression is physical aggression which can be directed in three ways: at others, at objects (**Ask students** if they have ever hit a physical object such as a wall or wanted to throw their phone), and at yourself (**Ask for examples** of physical aggression towards ourselves—some kinds of alcohol and drug addiction, cutting, hitting yourself, suicide).
 - The second kind of Hostile Aggression is social aggression. (ask for further examples).
 - To lead into the discussion of the universal human phobia, **Ask students:** Is it possible for social aggression to feel worse than physical aggression?
 - Why is this?

10 mins

Talk about the **Universal Human Phobia**

- **Ask students:** What is a phobia? **Allow for responses.**
- Practically everyone has a phobia—it’s nothing to be ashamed of.
- **Ask students:** What are some examples of phobias?
- There is one phobia that is shared by ninety-eight percent of humans.
- Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman calls this the **Universal Human Phobia**.
- It is the most common phobia of all.
- **Ask students:** What is the phobia shared by ninety-eight percent of people? Can you guess what it is?
- **Answer:** Ninety-eight percent of humans have a phobia of human aggression directed at them.

Side Note

- If students respond by saying “public speaking,” they are partially correct, because the universal human phobia is the underlying fear that causes people to be afraid of public speaking.
- If students respond by saying being humiliated, betrayed, or anything to do with human beings hurting us, they are also partially correct.
- The universal human phobia encompasses all forms of malicious human harm that seem to directly target us, which can include humiliation and betrayal.
- **Have students write the definition of the Universal Human Phobia on their worksheets.**

Read aloud and direct students to read along to themselves the excerpt on **pg. 4 of their worksheets** from *The Cosmic Ocean* which makes clear how our fear of human aggression directed at us can be even greater than our fear of death.

“Every year in America tens of thousands die in car accidents, but every day millions of people drive casually to work. However, a few murders by a serial killer can cause a city to go on alert, striking terror in many of its citizens. The September 11 attacks, even though they killed far fewer people than car accidents and smoking related deaths annually, created so much fear that our country has never been the same since.

In an article in The Atlantic titled “Americans Are as Likely to Be Killed by Their Own Furniture as by Terrorism,” Micah Zenko wrote: “Of the 13,288 people killed by terrorist attacks [around the world] last year [2011], seventeen were private U.S. citizens, or .001 percent ... The number of U.S. citizens who died in terrorist attacks increased by two between 2010 and 2011; overall, a comparable number of Americans are crushed to death by their televisions or furniture each year. This is not to diminish the real—albeit shrinking—threat of terrorism, or to minimize the loss and suffering of the 13,000 killed and over 45,000 injured around the world. For Americans, however, it should emphasize that an irrational fear of terrorism is both unwarranted and a poor basis for public policy decisions.”

The death of every person killed by terrorism is tragic, yet if fifteen thousand Americans were killed by terrorism every year (a thousand times the fifteen Americans killed in 2010), this would still be less than half the number of Americans killed in car accidents annually (usually between thirty and forty thousand).” From *The Cosmic Ocean*, pp. 212-213.

- **Ask students:** If car accidents are statistically more likely to kill us, why do people tend to be so much more afraid of terrorism, mass shooters, and violent home invasion than they are of car accidents?
- **Answer:** Because terrorism, mass shootings are acts of human aggression.

Side Note:

- If students say the reason we are more afraid of terrorism than car accidents is because we do not have control when terrorism or other incidents of human violence are concerned, but we do have control when driving is concerned, remind them of the lack of control we have when riding in a taxi or sleeping while someone else is driving (discussed further on pp. 213-214 of *The Cosmic Ocean*)
 - Also, natural disasters are an example where we lack control, but most of us still fear these events less than we fear human aggression directed at us (the universal human phobia).
- To better understand the universal human phobia, I am going to give you two grim scenarios, and you tell me which scenario is more traumatizing.

- In the first scenario you are riding your bike, you fall off your bike, and you break your leg.
- In the second scenario you are riding your bike, a group of people grab you, hold you down, and break your leg with a baseball bat.
- Which scenario is more traumatizing? *Allow for responses.*
- **Ask students:** If the physical injury—a broken leg—is the same in both scenarios, then why is it more traumatizing if people intentionally break our leg?

Side Note:

- If students say that it is more traumatizing to have our leg broken by attackers because the attackers can come back, remind them that accidents can also reoccur.
- We could experience an accident at almost any moment of any day, but accidents do not cause as much fear in most people as malicious human attacks do.
- **Answer:** Because of the universal human phobia.
- We are so vulnerable to human-induced trauma that a human being doesn't even have to physically touch us to traumatize us.
- A human being can traumatize us by betraying us, humiliating us, verbally abusing us, spreading malicious gossip about us, shunning us, etc.
- This is one of the reasons why racial slurs can be so traumatizing.

15 mins

Return to the Three forms of Aggression:

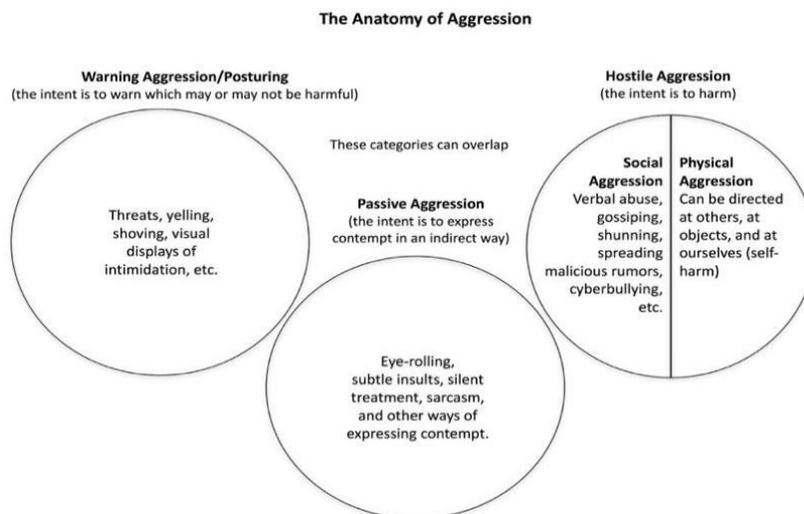
2. The second form of Aggression is Passive Aggression, which means indirectly showing contempt.

- Contempt can be defined as feelings of disrespect.
- We can show this contempt consciously or unconsciously.
- **Ask students:** Can you think of other examples of passive aggression?
- **Make sure that examples such as eye-rolling, sighing, and sarcasm have been listed.**
- These are examples of aggression, and remember that when people are aggressive they are in distress.

3. There is a third kind of aggression, that most of us didn't learn about in school (you are unlikely to get any examples of this spontaneously from students).

- Imagine there is a pack of wolves, a grizzly bear, and a dead deer.
- Both the pack of wolves and the grizzly bear want to eat the dead deer.
- **Ask students:** What usually happens?
- **Answer:** In these situations, animals typically do not fight, they posture.
- When animals in nature posture, they make noise and try to appear larger.
- What does a cat do? *Allow for responses.*
 - Can anyone do an impression of a cat posturing?

- Cats not only posture by making noise, but they also posture by appearing larger when they arch their back, or when the hair on their back stands up.
- What does a rattlesnake do? **Allow for responses.**
 - Rattlesnakes not only posture by shaking their tails to make a rattling sound, but they also coil their bodies, which serves the dual purpose of allowing them to appear larger and giving them the option to strike if they need to.
- What does a cobra do? **Allow for responses.**
 - Cobras not only make noise by hissing, but they also lift their head and spread their hood to look larger.
- What does a gorilla do? **Allow for responses.**
 - Gorillas posture by beating their chest, showing their teeth, standing on their back legs, or charging.
- **Ask students:** Why do animals in nature posture? Unless they are hunting, why do they prefer to posture rather than fight?
- **Answer:** There are no hospitals or emergency rooms in the wild!
- Even if you win a fight, you might break your leg, break your jaw, or get an infection from an injury and die.
- Violence in nature is very dangerous, so animals prefer to avoid violence if they can.
- Watch **three short videos** from animals posturing in the wild (available on your shared Google Drive or at these links)
 - Wolves and Bears <https://youtu.be/OhyLJeBuvos>
 - Mother Bear Posturing Against Hunting Wolves <https://youtu.be/A56wgWDAYmM>
 - Lynxes Posturing
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8DvmGiMAvw&feature=youtu.be>
- The student **worksheet** when completed should look like this:



- In our current education system, the vast majority of students never learn about warning aggression, which we can also call posturing. They only learn about the fight or flight response, even though posturing is the preferred method of self-defense for so many animals, and it is the most common form of aggression in nature.
- **Ask students:** Again, why is this the most common form of aggression in nature? Why do animals prefer posturing to violence?
- **Answer:** Because it is much safer for the animals involved.
- **This is also why we should never use the words violence and aggression interchangeably. We should never use them as synonyms.**
- Most aggression in animals is warning aggression/posturing which is meant to **prevent** and **avoid** violence, so although aggression can be violent in the form of hostile aggression, most aggression is warning aggression, which is not violent.
- Now what happens if you ignore the warning? *Allow for responses.*
- If you ignore the warning, **then** the animal has the fight or flight response.
- So when a rattlesnake shakes its tail, it is a good idea to pay attention to the warning and walk away.
- If you ignore the warning, the rattlesnake might bite you.
- **Show them the next video, available at this link, or on your shared google drive**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxHqdUUr_U0&feature=youtu.be
- In this video two bears posture with each other, trying to warn each other.
- They each ignore multiple warnings from the other.
- They not only growl **a lot** and stand up, but they push each other multiple times.
- In this video, also notice **how** these bears fight each other.
- When bears and many other predators hunt, they often bite the neck and stomach of their prey in order to kill.
- When these bears end up fighting after a lot of posturing, notice that they don't bite each other's necks and stomachs, because they are not trying to kill each other.
- In some ways, this fight looks similar to a wrestling match between humans.
- **Ask students:** Any questions?
- **Ask students:** Do humans posture? *Allow for responses.*
- **Ask students:** What are examples of humans posturing? *Allow for responses.*
- There are many examples, such as ancient Greek soldiers wearing big helmets, like the crest on the Spartan helmet!
- Also soldiers screaming when they go into battle, the Haka of the Māori people, posturing between men or women before they get into a fight (e.g. standing tall, puffing out their chests, yelling), the many forms of posturing between nations (e.g., developing and stockpiling nuclear weapons), the loud noise of a gun.
- Lt. Colonel Dave Grossman writes about this in his book *On Combat*

- In nature, whoever makes the biggest bark or the biggest roar is most likely to win the battle.
- **Read aloud and direct students to read along to themselves** the excerpt on the bottom of **pg. 4 of their worksheets** from *The Cosmic Ocean*

This is one of the primary reasons why the early, clumsy, smoothbore, muzzleloading muskets replaced the longbow and the crossbow. The longbow and the crossbow had many times the rate of fire, more accuracy and far greater accurate range when compared to the early smoothbore muskets. Yet these superior military weapons were replaced, almost overnight (historically speaking) by vastly inferior muskets. While they were inferior at killing, they were not inferior at psychologically stunning and daunting an opponent . . . If you are in a battle going *doink, doink* with a crossbow and the other guy is going *Boom! Boom!* with a musket, all things being equal, the doinker will lose every time.
- Grossman calls this the **Bigger Bang Theory** - The army that can make louder noise has an advantage on the battlefield.
- Have students **identify the kinds of aggression** displayed in the cartoons on **p. 5 of their worksheets**

5 mins

- Here is a video that shows an example of humans posturing. This video is from *South Park*.
 - Show Southpark clip (30 secs, mild profanity: “Punk-ass”)
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHnbC1N_G6w
- **Ask students:** What was the fire causing the heat of their warning aggression? *Allow for responses.*
- **Answer:** The fire was feelings of disrespect. As soon as the disrespect went away, the aggression went away.
- **Ask students:** Did it seem like the two men wanted to escalate their aggression to violence? *Allow for responses.*
- Just like animals, we often use warning aggression when we are afraid of violence.
- **Recognizing that warning aggression is caused by fear or some other kind of distress requires empathy.**
- When someone is coming at you aggressively posturing, it is hard to empathetically recognize their fear or other kind of distress.
- That’s why you have to *practice* the skills of recognizing your own and other’s aggression as a distress response.
- When we empathetically see the fire beneath the aggression of others, this allows us to have even **more** empathy for them.

- We might not know the specific fires they're dealing with, but we can recognize that they're in distress of some kind.
- When we see the fire beneath our own aggression, we can learn how to deal with the fire rather than just lashing out with aggression.
- We are going to take a five minute break; when we come back, we are going to watch a video from *Key and Peele*.

5 mins

Break

10 mins

This next clip brilliantly shows many of the metaphorical fires (the distress, pain or discomfort) that can cause the heat of human aggression.

- *Show Key and Peele video "School Bully" (link below)*
- **Side note:** this is an important and instructive video for understanding the Fires of Aggression, however in the first 18 seconds Jordan Peele's character utters the word "bitch" multiple times – to avoid the appearance of endorsing this usage you can mute the video until 19 seconds in. He also utters the word "shit" but it is bleeped in the video. Finally, he uses the slur "queer" which is not bleeped – you might want to remind students that Jordan Peele's character is in distress and that we want to learn how to handle the kinds of conflicts depicted in the video rather than pretend they don't happen)
<http://www.cc.com/video-clips/kisry6/key-and-peeel-school-bully>
- **Tell students:** Focus on Jordan Peele's character, and his dad, as they are the ones behaving aggressively.
- Fill out these questions **on p. 6 of you worksheet:**
 - What were some of the fires causing the heat of Jordan Peele's character's aggression ?
 - What were some of the fires causing the heat of his father's aggression?
- **Ask students to read their answers out loud.** *Point to those fires if they are already listed, or add them if they are not listed.*
- Recognizing aggression as a distress response requires **empathy**.
- Recognizing aggression as a distress response is a **skill** that expands your options when you're responding to your own aggression or someone else's aggression.
- Aggression has its place. If you are surrounded by wolves, it can be best to use warning aggression or posturing.
- But if you are having a conflict in your relationship or community, or even with a stranger, peace skills offer us more effective options in the vast majority of situations.
- Recognizing aggression in yourself or others as a distress response, forces you to pause, even for a few seconds, which allows you to evaluate your next step more carefully.

- We should only use aggression, of any kind, as a last resort.
- Again, recognizing aggression as a distress response is a skill and skills require learning and practice.

Ask: Any Questions?

15 mins

Exercise for Listening with Empathy

Divide the room along its longest axis and hang two signs one at either end: Agree, Disagree

- **Pick a prompt ahead of time** that is relevant to the students and for which you can think of good arguments in certain contexts for agreeing **and** disagreeing
- Tell them to stand and tuck away their bags
- **Read out the prompt**
- **(if there is time, have them write out their response to the prompt**
- if they aren't sure of their view, or if their view requires more complexity than is allowed by simply agreeing or disagreeing, reassure them that they will have a chance to explain the nuances of their own views during the exercise and that the main point is to exchange viewpoints with someone else.
- Tell them not to answer their views out loud, but to move to the side of the room that fits with their view.
- Have them form a continuum stretching from the Agree to Disagree positions.
- Have them lock elbows, and double back until everyone is facing someone from the other end of the continuum (there will be some in the middle who are noncommittal which is not a problem).
- Tell them this is an exercise in empathetic listening.
- Have them shake hands and introduce each other.
- **Ask students** how they will communicate empathy and respect nonverbally – usually nodding and making eye contact (there might be cultural differences here).
- Choose which side of the room will speak first about their view.
- Tell them to breathe deeply. Feel their feet contact the ground. Look at their partner.
- The first partner speaks for ONE MINUTE, the other partner DOES NOT SPEAK, BUT LISTENS CAREFULLY.
- Then for ONE MINUTE the listening partner repeats what they heard, without saying whether they agree or disagree, using terms the speaking partner would recognize as their own.
- Allow 30 seconds for clarification between the partners.
- Now switch.

5 mins

Debrief

- This was a simple exercise in listening with empathy.
- To get better at it we'd need to make it harder each time.
- **Ask students:** how might we make it harder?
- **Possible answers:** pick more personal topics, listen for longer than 1 min., list 2 points of agreement).

5 mins

Lesson Summary:

Have students turn to last page of their worksheet

Draw Venn Diagram (as below right) Healthier Ways to Deal with Pain/Discomfort:

- All aggression is caused by pain/discomfort, but not all pain/discomfort has to lead to aggression!
- We can use Peace Literacy which gives us a larger range of options/skills.
- We can exercise our empathy so we can recognize when we or others are in distress.
 - **In others:** When we empathetically see the fire beneath the aggression of **others**, this allows us to have even **more** empathy for them which can expand our options for responding effectively.
 - We might not know the specific fires they're dealing with, but we can recognize that they're in distress of some kind.
 - **In ourselves:** When we see the fire beneath **our own** aggression, we can learn how to deal with the fire rather than just lashing out with aggression.
- The skill of recognizing aggression as a distress response forces you to pause, even for a few seconds, which can be the time you need to consider options.
- Our next lesson will focus on some of these options.



5 mins

Empathy Exercise 2 (empathy for others—it's on the **last page of the student worksheet**)
(if there's no time, add it at the end of the day as a follow-up exercise)

- You won't share this with anyone. Think about someone you know who is struggling (don't write their name), and list 1 or 2 kinds of distress (emotions) they might be feeling.

Follow-up resources/activities to keep the momentum with students

- **The Aggression Journal:** Have students keep a journal where they note the times they have felt aggression in themselves; and ask them to see if after this lesson they can reach deeper to identify the underlying fires (pain, discomfort) that are causing their aggression (fear? embarrassment?).
- **Handout rubric (below)** that they can use to guide their observations.
- **If there wasn't time** for the empathy for others exercise (#2) at the end of the worksheet, highlight that now
- Also, **check out Jimmy Kimmel on passive aggressive texting:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07TinrpKG6o>

Criteria	Level I Competency	Level II Competency	Level III Competency	Level IV Competency
Individual is developing self-awareness of distress when acting aggressively or thinking aggressive thoughts.	Can recognize feelings of distress underlying aggressive thoughts and actions after conflict/incident has occurred.	Can recognize feelings of distress during the conflict/incident and is able to <i>attempt</i> to stop or minimize the behavior during the conflict/incident.	Can recognize feelings of distress before aggression or aggressive thoughts. Can redirect these thoughts or actions and keep them from occurring.	Can recognize that this skill is context dependent – that is we can be skilled at this in some contexts but not others. Can exercise self-compassion when skill levels fluctuate.
Teacher self-check: Are you modeling this for your students and colleagues? 😊	Depth/consistency: You might have deep competency at this level but not at other levels, and not all the time.	Depth/consistency: You might have deep competency at this level but not at other levels, and not all the time.	Depth/consistency: You might have deep competency at this level but not at other levels, and not all the time.	Depth/consistency: You might have deep competency at this level but not at other levels, and not all the time.

Peace Literacy: *The Anatomy of Aggression and its Fires, Day 2*
(an abridged version of Peace Literacy Lesson Plan 1)

Learning Outcomes for 2nd lesson

(90 minutes including a 5 min break, video clips, and exercises)

- Exercise Empathy to Recognize Distress in Ourselves
- Calm Others Down During Conflict
- Calm Ourselves Down During Conflict
- Recognize the Fuels that Can Cause the Fires of Aggression
- Listen with Empathy and Appreciation

5 mins

Distribute worksheet

Lead Empathy Exercise 1 from worksheet:

- We're going to begin with another exercise where you practice having empathy for yourself.
- ***Write down*** 1 or 2 things that are nagging at you in the background, lingering worries or concerns that have nothing directly to do with this class but might affect your learning today
 - Bringing these issues to conscious attention is called mindfulness.
 - Read over the concerns you've listed—don't make a judgment about whether the concerns are good or bad, reasonable or unreasonable, they are **human** concerns.
 - This exercise won't get rid of those intrusive thoughts, but by noticing them they are less likely to have an effect—they won't surprise you.
 - And when these concerns come back, which they might, perhaps several times during this class, you can recognize them now as old friends: "Oh look, here is some anxiety again."
 - This recognition is self-compassion, which means having empathy for yourself.
 - It helps you to be kind to yourself.
 - It is not easy being human – cut yourself some slack!
 - If this seems difficult, remember that you can gradually get better at this, just like you can gradually get better at anything through learning and practice.
 - Practice doing this on your own at the start of each class, and **remember that everyone in the class is having their own struggles!**
- ***Write this on the board as you say it:***
- We can think of training as two things: 1. Learning 2. Practice.
- If we want to get better at something, this requires training in the form of learning and practice.

- Yesterday we ended with a Venn Diagram illustrating **Peace Literacy training for Healthier Ways to Deal with Pain/Discomfort:**
- All aggression is caused by pain/discomfort/distress, but not all pain/discomfort/distress has to lead to aggression!
- We can learn and practice Peace Literacy, which gives us a larger range of options/skills.
- We can exercise our empathy so we can recognize when we or others are in distress.
 - **In others:** When we empathetically see the fire beneath the aggression of **others**, this allows us to have even **more** empathy for them which can expand our options for responding effectively.
 - We might not know the specific fires they're dealing with, but we can recognize that they're in distress of some kind.
 - **In ourselves:** When we see the fire beneath **our own** aggression, we can learn how to deal with the fire rather than just lashing out with aggression.
- The skill of recognizing aggression as a distress response forces you to pause, even for a few seconds, which can be the time you need to consider options.
- The more that we rely on peace skills to solve conflicts in our relationship or community, and the less we rely on aggression, the more shared trust and shared empathy we can build in our relationship or community, and the more resilient our relationship or community can become.
- Aggression has its place. If you are surrounded by wolves, it can be best to use warning aggression or posturing.
- But if you are having a conflict in your relationship or community, or even with a stranger, peace skills offer us more effective options in the vast majority of situations.
- This lesson will focus on some of these more effective options.



We get some hints at these options from the Key and Peele sketch, this time by **focusing** on Michael Keegan Key's character

- **Show Key and Peele video again** (remember first 18 seconds contain profanity – you can mute it until 19 seconds in) <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/kisry6/key-and-peele-school-bully>
- **Tell students this time to focus on** Michael Keegan Key's character.

10 mins

Have students Think/write in their worksheet/pair/share: What did Michael Keegan Key's character do really well?

- He stayed calm!
- Staying calm is the first step to keeping other people calm.
- Telling people "Calm down" almost never works!

- **Ask students:** Why does telling people to calm down rarely work? **Allow for responses.**
- **Answer:** When people are upset, they usually feel that they have a right to be upset, that they are justified in being upset.
- Telling people to calm down can feel dismissive of their distress and in some cases even demeaning.
- **Ask students:** What else did Michael Keegan Key’s character do well? **Allow for responses.**

5 mins

To calm other people down—which Michael Keegan Key’s character did very well—we need to practice three skills (**write these on the board, have students fill in their worksheets**)

- 1. Be calm ourselves.**
 - We’ll talk about ways to stay calm ourselves in a few minutes.
 - **Aggression and panic can be contagious, but calm can be contagious too.**
 - 2. Listen with empathy and be respectful.**
 - We practiced this yesterday and will practice again today.
 - 3. Show care and concern.**
 - This is a very important and often overlooked step.
 - If you borrow someone’s car, wreck it, and they are yelling at you, if you just stay calm they might mistake your calm for apathy.
 - You have to show care and concern.
 - One way to do this is by saying it.
 - **Ask students:** What is something that you could say in this situation to show care and concern? **Allow for responses.**
- **Highlight for students** that even though Michael Keegan Key’s character stayed calm, he was not passively “turning the other cheek.”
 - He was **actively** practicing peace skills.
 - Remember, these three skills are not a guarantee; they might not always completely calm the situation. However, they will:
 - Give you a higher probability of success.
 - Be far less likely to escalate the conflict.
 - Decrease the likelihood of creating bad blood.
 - **Ask students:** What does the phrase “bad blood” mean?
 - **Answer:** Bad blood is created when we say something harmful during a conflict that generates animosity or increases animosity between you and another person.
 - When bad blood is created, you not only have to deal with whatever conflict you are having with this person, but now you also have animosity or increased animosity to deal with.
 - Bad blood makes your life more stressful and complicated.

Even though Michael Keegan Key's character was not able to completely calm down Jordan Peele's character, Key's character was able to prevent the situation from escalating and his actions did not create bad blood.

10 mins

Discuss 4 steps to staying calm ourselves

Calming ourselves down is not an all or nothing process.

- Every bit can help.
- Even if we can only calm ourselves down a little bit, this can help.
- **Ask students:** Why is it important to be able to calm ourselves down? **Allow for answers.**
- Martial arts, sports, performance arts, the military, and peace leaders such as Gandhi and the Reverend Dr. MLK Jr. teach people the importance of being calm under pressure.
- When we can calm ourselves under pressure, this can help us think more clearly and make better decisions.
- Our minds do not function optimally when we are filled with anger or panic.
- **Write these four techniques in a list on the board. Have students fill in their worksheets:**
 1. **Maintain empathy** when we are in conflict with someone.
Recognize the fire beneath their aggression; recognize that their aggression is a response to distress.
 2. **Give people the benefit of the doubt** when we are in conflict with them, which means seeking clarification rather than acting from a position of ignorance.
 3. **Do not personalize the conflict**, which means using empathy to escape the confines of our own ego, and training our mind to see the other factors playing into the conflict.
 4. **Keep things in perspective**, which means training our mind to think about reasons why we appreciate people when we come into conflict with them.
 - This doesn't get rid of the conflict, but it helps us keep the conflict in proper perspective.
 - Conflict can blow things out of proportion, and people can destroy friendships and relationships over minor conflicts.

All four of these skills allow us to see the **bigger picture** by **broadening our perspective into the psyche of others, our own psyche, and the many factors that can be at play in a conflict**. Later we will discuss how these factors often include misunderstandings, miscommunications, and the misinterpretation of ambiguity.

10 mins

Now you can build on these points.

1. **Maintain empathy**
 - **Ask students,** "When we are in conflict with someone, how might having empathy for them help us remain calm?"

- **Answer:** As long as we maintain empathy for the person, we are less likely to be aggressive with them, and we are more likely to keep our temper under control.
- Empathy is also like a metaphorical eye that allows us to see deeper into ourselves, the other person, and the situation, which can help us more effectively interact with the other person and deal with the situation.
- We might still become frustrated, but having empathy keeps this frustration from building to a flood of rage.
- Rage prevents us from being able to reason clearly. That is one reason why we have to put so much effort into strengthening our empathy.

2. Give People the Benefit of the Doubt

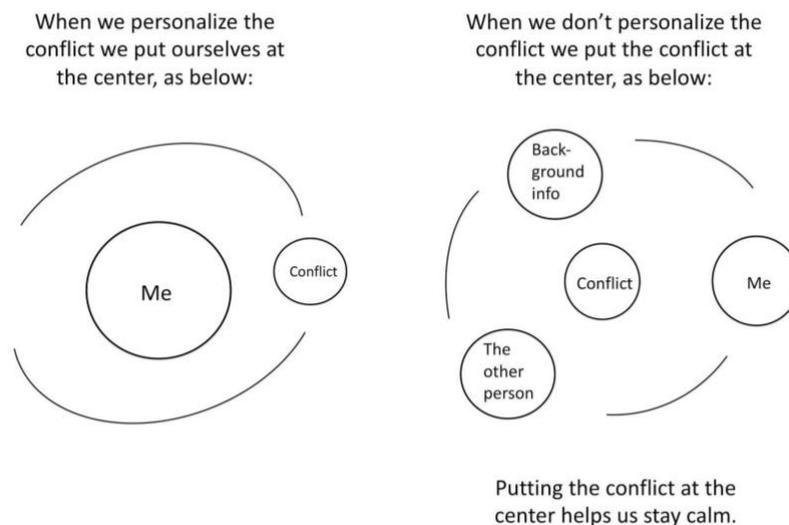
- Often when we are in a conflict with someone we learn later that we were mistaken and that we had misunderstood the person or the situation.
- **Ask students,** “What does it mean to give someone the benefit of the doubt?” and “How might this help us remain calm during a conflict?” **Allow for responses.**
- **Answer:** Giving people the benefit of the doubt means seeking clarification rather than acting from a position of ignorance. When we jump to conclusions we act from a position of ignorance.
- How would you feel if people did not give you the benefit of the doubt, versus someone who did give you the benefit of the doubt? How would this affect your trust toward them?

Note to remind students: Advocating these peace skills does not mean condoning aggressive behavior or refusing to hold people accountable for that behavior.

- Practicing these peace skills **helps us** hold people accountable in ways that are fair and just.
- Staying calm by seeking clarification is necessary for assigning accountability fairly.
- When we stay calm we are in a better position as community members to assign consequences for aggressive behavior that are fair and just, rather than vengeful and cruel.
- When it comes to demanding accountability, we need to keep from personalizing the other person’s actions in ways that go beyond accountability and into vengeance.
- **Have students turn to page 3 of their worksheets, and on the board draw a simple ship on the sea.**
 - Our community is like a ship and the sea represents accountability.
 - Sailing the sea of accountability is a challenge for every community.
 - The four skills for staying calm help our community navigate the sea of accountability.
 - Giving the benefit of the doubt, for example, puts us in a better position as community members to assign consequences for aggressive behavior that are fair and just, rather than vengeful and cruel.
 - Embracing vengeance is like sinking beneath the sea.

3. Do not personalize the conflict

- **Ask students:** When we personalize a conflict, how can this distort how we see the conflict?
Answer: When we personalize a conflict, we put ourselves at the center.
- Not personalizing a conflict means putting the conflict at the center, and trying to understand the factors revolving around the conflict. This allows us to see the bigger picture.
- We are just one of those factors. We might be the primary factor causing the conflict, or the conflict could be caused by other factors not related to us, such as the person having a bad day at work or reacting to trauma.
- **Illustrate this on the board with two diagrams (see below)**
 - In the one diagram, titled “Personalizing the Conflict” you write the word “Me” at the center, and draw the factors revolving around the word “Me” (similar to how people used to think that the Sun and other planets revolved around the Earth).
 - In the second diagram, titled “Not Personalizing the Conflict” you write the words “The Conflict” at the center, and “Me” along with other factors revolving around “The Conflict” (similar to how we now know that the planets, including the Earth, revolve around the Sun).
 - Not personalizing the conflict is similar to the Copernican Revolution that changed how we viewed what was at the center of our solar system.
 - How would you feel if someone personalized every interaction you had with them? How would this affect your trust toward them?
 - How would you feel instead if someone didn’t personalize everything and saw the bigger picture? How would this affect your trust toward them?



4. Keep things in perspective

When we are in a conflict with someone we often **lose perspective**. For example, we suddenly dislike everything about the person.

- **Ask students** Have you ever suddenly disliked everything about someone when you got into a conflict with them? How did this affect the way you saw the conflict? **Allow for responses.**
- **Answer:** When we suddenly dislike everything about someone when we get into a conflict with them, this can cause us to lose perspective and make the conflict seem bigger.
- Share with students that one effective technique for keeping the conflict in perspective is to train our mind to **think about reasons why we appreciate people** when we have conflicts with them.
- Even a small conflict can blow things out of proportion and cause us to lose perspective, and cultivating appreciation helps us keep things in perspective.
- Many people have destroyed friendships and relationships over small conflicts, because they lost perspective.

5 mins

Lead an Appreciation Exercise from p. 3 of the worksheet which helps develop the skill of **keeping things in perspective during a conflict**. (You won't be asked to share this.)

- Think of someone with whom you've had a conflict (don't write their name).
- Write down two things you appreciate about them:
- Remind students that these are skills, and like any skill, we will not master them overnight.
- Strengthening any skill requires practice and effort.

Finally, acknowledge that sometimes it is important to feel **outrage** when we witness certain kinds of conflicts.

- **Ask students**, "What kinds of conflicts should cause us to feel outrage?"
- Being calm does not mean that we never feel outrage.
- Confronting injustice can sometimes cause us to feel moral outrage.
- But our minds function optimally and we are best prepared to solve problems like injustice when we can be calm under pressure.
- Remember that martial arts, sports, performance arts, the military, and peace leaders such as Gandhi and the Reverend Dr. MLK Jr. teach people the importance of being calm under pressure.
- When we can calm ourselves under pressure, this can help us think more clearly and make better decisions.
- Our minds do not function optimally when we are filled with anger or panic.

Note: These four skills for calming ourselves down are **psychological techniques** and are primarily meant to help us remain calm in the midst of conflicts with other humans.

There are also **physical techniques**, such as “tactical breathing” that can help us remain calm in conflicts with humans, or in emergency situations of any kind.

5 mins

Break

5 mins

Present a Tactical Breathing Exercise to Help Remain Calm in the Midst of Struggle

- Soldiers need to learn to be calm in the midst of very difficult and even life threatening struggles.
- Many soldiers use Tactical Breathing, which can also be called Combat Breathing or Four Count Breathing to help them stay calm under fire.
- It is similar to breathing techniques in the yogic tradition that are thousands of years old.
- ***Have students read along with you from p. 4 of their worksheets*** the following passage from Lt. Col. Dave Grossman’s book *On Combat*:

Tactical Breathing Exercise

One of the most common breathing techniques for calming yourself down is Four Count Breathing, also referred to as Tactical or Combat Breathing. Four Count breathing requires you to consciously regulate the amount of airflow your body is receiving over four second intervals. While it can be a difficult technique to master under extreme stress, the principle of the breathing is simple.

Breathing is as follows:

- 1. Slowly inhale a deep breath over 4 seconds.*
- 2. Hold the breath in for 4 seconds.*
- 3. Slowly exhale the breath out over 4 seconds.*
- 4. Hold the empty breath for 4 seconds.*
- 5. Repeat until your breathing is under control.*

In other words, take a deep breath through your nose for a count of four. 1, 2, 3, 4. Hold that breath for a count of four. 1, 2, 3, 4. Breath out through your mouth for a count of four. 1, 2, 3, 4. Hold again for a count of four without breathing at all. Then repeat the entire process four times. If your heart is racing this is a very quick way to slow it down and get a hold of yourself. It is a technique that I’ve used in my military and civilian life and has allowed me to control not only my body but my thoughts when doing things.

You can use Tactical Breathing when you need to quickly get control of your breathing. It will take focus and control to maintain this rhythm . . . Every person is different and sometimes repeating it 4 times does not calm people down, they might need to do it 5 or 6 times. It depends on the individual, but a general rule,

especially when there isn't a lot of time such as in a combat situation, 4 is the way to go (from Greg Swanson's 2011 online summary of *Warrior Mindset* by Asken et al 2010).

Lead students in a practice of 3 rounds of breathing.

10 mins

Examine the Fuels that Feed the Fires Beneath Aggression:

- We can experience multiple fires at the same time, leading to a larger inferno
- But there are also multiple kinds of fuel.

Have students list on p. 4 of their worksheets, the three kinds of fuel that feed the fires beneath aggression, and provide examples of each.

- Some fuels result from **structures** in our society (such as racist structures that can cause distress)
- Some fuels result from **situations** (such as losing your job, your car breaking down, or having a family tragedy)
- Some fuels result from our **perception** (such as how we interpret situations, especially in terms of misunderstanding, miscommunication, or misinterpreting ambiguity)
- We can also experience multiple sources of fuel at the same time
- **Societal fuels** include institutional injustices such as racism.
 - The experience of racism can fuel various fires of aggression: fear, humiliation, feeling disrespected, alienation, etc.
- The **Situational fuels** are the easiest to recognize (e.g., when someone cuts you off in traffic).
- **Perceptual fuels** involve misunderstanding, miscommunication, or misinterpreting ambiguity.
 - When people are struggling with trauma or feeling aggressive, they can be more likely to misinterpret ambiguous situations by assuming hostile intent behind people's actions. (e.g., a kid being bumped into in the hall interpreting the bump as intentional hostile aggression).
- All these three kinds of fuel can be connected.
- We can also experience multiple sources of fuel at the same time leading to a much larger inferno:
 - Imagine you have as a fuel, a **situational conflict** (someone gossips about you on social media) that starts to cause a fire/distress (feeling disrespected, humiliated, alienated, betrayed, disillusioned).
 - If the **societal fuel of racism** is added to the situational fuel, this can escalate the fire significantly.

- If you add the **perceptual fuel** of misunderstanding and miscommunication and ambiguity things get even worse (social media is notorious for escalating misunderstandings because of mechanical distance).
- Most disrespect is caused in some way by misunderstanding and miscommunication.
- **So when we have conflicts, we should *expect* that ambiguity, misunderstanding, and miscommunication are a likely fuel source.**
- Seeking clarification helps us clear up ambiguity, misunderstanding, and miscommunication.

Empathy Break:

- How many of the adults that you know practice these skills? Probably not many.
- Think of some of your teachers, or your parents, or politicians you've seen on tv .
- But the reason they don't practice these skills is not because they learned them and rejected them, but because they never learned them.
- They are floundering without much skill because they don't know any other options
- Remembering this might help you have empathy for them.

15 mins

Lead another Exercise for Listening with Empathy *with added level of difficulty!*

Once again divide the room along its longest axis and hang two signs one at either end: Agree, Disagree

- **Pick a prompt ahead of time** that is relevant to the students and for which you can think of good arguments in certain contexts for agreeing **and** disagreeing
- Tell them to stand and tuck away their bags
- Read out the prompt
- If there is time have them write out their response to the prompt
- Tell them not to answer their views out loud, but to move to the side of the room that fits with their view.
- Then have them form a continuum stretching from the Agree to Disagree positions
- Have them lock elbows, and double back until everyone is facing someone from the other end of the continuum (there will be some in the middle who are noncommittal and that's ok)
- Remind them this is an exercise in empathetic listening.
- Have them shake hands and introduce each other.
- **Remind them to** communicate empathy and respect nonverbally – usually nodding and making eye contact (there might be cultural differences here)
- Choose which side of the room will speak first about their view.
- Tell them to breathe deeply. Feel their feet contact the ground. Look at their partner.
- The first partner speaks for ONE MINUTE, the other partner DOES NOT SPEAK, BUT LISTENS CAREFULLY.

- **Added difficulty!** For ONE MINUTE the listening partner repeats what they heard, **and** says **two things** they appreciate about the other person's viewpoint.
- Now switch.
- Have them end by shaking hands again.

5 mins

Debrief

- **Ask students:** Was this harder? easier? why or why not?

Please Share Your Experience!

If you used ***Peace Literacy: The Anatomy of Aggression and its Fires*** in your class, **please send a quick email** to our curriculum coordinator, Sharyn.clough@oregonstate.edu, and let us know:

- * the name of your school or school district
- * how many students were in your class
- * what parts worked best
- * any suggestions you have for improvement

Thank you! 😊