

Head, Heart, Conscience

Rationale

The classroom is a place where students should learn with intellectual rigor, emotional engagement, and ethical reflection, and come to understand that their own views and choices matter. We represent these core educational values in Facing History's [pedagogical triangle](#), which reflects our synthesis of social-emotional learning and civic education with academic subjects.

This integration of head, heart, and ethics is always important to learning, and it is particularly crucial when students are considering contentious or emotional topics. This strategy can be particularly useful for an initial discussion of complex and emotional current events and to help students clarify their relationship to and their perspective on the event.

Procedure

1. Ask Students to Respond to Head, Heart, Conscience Prompts

Introduce the event or topic that students should respond to. Depending on the context, you might choose to share some background information with students. Then, ask them to respond to a selection of the following prompts in their journals or on a piece of paper:

Head:

- What information do you know about this event?
- What information is confirmed? What remains uncertain? Are there any facts that are contested?
- What additional information would you like to have to help you understand the event better?

Heart:

- What emotions does this event raise for you?
- Are there particular moments, images, or stories that stand out to you? If so, why?

Conscience:

- What questions about fairness, equity, or justice does this event raise for you?
- What choices did key figures make, and what values may have guided those choices?

- How were people impacted by this event? Are there people who should be held accountable? If so, how?

2. Share and Reflect

Students can share aspects of their reflections with the class or directly with you. If you plan to discuss the event or topic further, use students' responses to guide your subsequent lessons.

Variations

Respond to a Specific Source

You can also share a source—such as an article, video, or image—with your students and ask them to reflect on the source using the following prompts:

Head: What information did you learn from this source? What questions do you still have?

Heart: What emotions does this source raise for you? What aspect of the source stands out to you the most and why?

Conscience: What questions about right or wrong, fairness or injustice, does this source raise for you?

Explore other tools and strategies to help teachers organize discussions on current events in their classrooms using our [Educator Guide](#).

Related Content

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/head-heart-conscience>

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