

Conflict & Conscience

Focus: Ethics and Human Rights

Project Type: Socratic Discussion and Ethical Reasoning Podcast

Length: 4–5 class periods

Product: 7–9 minute group podcast episode

Mode: Small group (3–5 students)

Learning Objectives

Students will:

1. Examine moral and ethical questions found in literature, history, or modern life.
2. Evaluate differing perspectives on justice, duty, and human rights.
3. Engage in structured, evidence-based ethical reasoning and respectful discussion.
4. Communicate ideas clearly in an academic yet conversational podcast format.

Standards Alignment (CCSS):

- RL.9-10.2 and RH.9-10.2 – Analyze how themes or central ideas develop over the course of a text or event.
 - SL.9-10.1 – Engage effectively in collaborative discussions, building on diverse viewpoints.
 - W.9-10.1 – Write arguments to support claims using valid reasoning and evidence.
 - SL.9-10.4 – Present information and reasoning clearly, concisely, and persuasively.
-

Project Overview

Conflict & Conscience challenges students to investigate ethical dilemmas that test human values, civic responsibility, and moral courage. Each group selects a **core ethical question** drawn from a literary work, historical episode, or current event. Students then research context, identify multiple perspectives, and record a Socratic-style conversation exploring possible answers.

The resulting episode should model respectful dialogue, integrating reasoning, empathy, and real-world application.

Session Breakdown

Session 1 – Framing the Ethical Question

Goal: Choose a compelling moral dilemma and define the context.

Activities:

- Brainstorm a list of universal ethical questions. Examples include:
 - Should individuals obey unjust laws?
 - Is violence ever justified in pursuit of justice?
 - Do the ends ever justify the means?
 - What do societies owe to the oppressed or powerless?
 - Can freedom exist without equality?
 - Choose a text, event, or issue that embodies the question.
Examples:
 - *Antigone* (civil disobedience and moral duty)
 - The Nuremberg Trials (justice after atrocity)
 - Civil Rights Movement protests (nonviolent resistance)
 - Refugee crises and global responsibility (modern ethics)
 - Conduct initial research using primary sources, historical accounts, or philosophical writings (for example, Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Gandhi’s writings, or excerpts from John Stuart Mill).
 - Complete an **Ethical Inquiry Organizer** listing:
 - The central question
 - Context or case study
 - At least two opposing viewpoints
 - Supporting evidence and quotations
-

Session 2 – Research and Discussion Planning

Goal: Develop balanced arguments and discussion points.

Activities:

- Gather factual, literary, or philosophical evidence supporting different sides of the ethical issue.
- Write short position statements (one per group member) expressing initial perspectives.
- As a group, design a **discussion outline** with:
 1. Key definitions (justice, duty, morality, rights, etc.)
 2. Main viewpoints or philosophical stances (for example, utilitarianism vs. deontology, moral absolutism vs. relativism).
 3. Guiding questions to provoke thoughtful exchange.
- Assign roles (see below) and rehearse transitions for a fluid conversation.

Sample Dialogue Excerpt:

Host: “Today we’re asking: Is it ever right to break the law for a higher moral cause?”

Speaker 1: “Antigone thought so—her conscience demanded she honor her brother, even if it meant death.”

Speaker 2: “But Creon’s argument was about order and the rule of law—he feared chaos if people followed only their personal morals.”

Speaker 3: “That same debate echoes through history—from Thoreau to Dr. King. So the question becomes, who decides what counts as a ‘just’ or ‘unjust’ law?”

Session 3 – Recording and Production

Goal: Record and edit a clear, balanced discussion.

Activities:

- Record with school devices or free software (Audacity, Soundtrap, or GarageBand).
- Maintain a conversational tone—formal but accessible.
- Include brief segments for:
 - **Introduction (1 minute):** The ethical question and context.
 - **Discussion (5–6 minutes):** Exploration of different perspectives with reasoning and evidence.
 - **Reflection (1–2 minutes):** What the group learned or what questions remain unresolved.
- Optional: Add a short introduction and outro with music or narration.
- Recommended length: 7–9 minutes total.

Example Opening Line:

“Welcome to *Conflict & Conscience*, the podcast where we confront the moral crossroads of history and literature—and ask what they can teach us about our world today.”

Session 4 – Listening and Reflection

Goal: Engage in ethical dialogue and self-assessment.

Activities:

- Share podcasts in a “Socratic Listening Gallery” format.
- Students complete a **Reflection Sheet**:
 - What ethical question did this episode explore?
 - Which argument or perspective did you find most compelling?
 - How did the discussion model respectful disagreement?
 - What personal beliefs or values were challenged?

- Teacher leads debrief linking recurring ethical themes (justice, duty, equality, truth, responsibility) across episodes.
-

Group Roles

Role	Responsibilities
Host/Moderator	Introduces question, guides discussion, keeps balance and pacing
Philosopher/Analyst	References ethical frameworks or theorists to deepen conversation
Historian/Literary Expert	Provides evidence from texts, primary sources, or events
Reflective Commentator	Summarizes key insights and offers final reflection
Producer/Editor	Manages recording, transitions, and technical clarity

Groups may adapt roles to class size or format.

Suggested Source Materials

Literary and Philosophical Texts

- Sophocles, *Antigone*
- Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience*
- Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (excerpts)
- John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (excerpts)
- Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*
- Elie Wiesel, *Night*
- George Orwell, *1984*
- Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Historical and Contemporary Topics

- Civil Rights Movement and nonviolent protest
 - Human rights and refugee crises
 - Whistleblowing and truth-telling in government or media
 - Technology, privacy, and surveillance ethics
 - Environmental justice and responsibility to future generations
-

Assessment Rubric (20 points)

Criteria	Excellent (5)	Proficient (4)	Developing (3)	Beginning (1–2)
Ethical Understanding	Deep insight into moral complexity with multiple viewpoints	Clear understanding of main ethical dimensions	Basic awareness with limited nuance	Oversimplified or one-sided reasoning
Evidence and Reasoning	Integrates diverse sources and strong arguments	Uses relevant examples and clear logic	Some evidence or logic gaps	Minimal or weak evidence
Collaboration and Discussion	Balanced participation and respectful exchange	Mostly balanced, some uneven pacing	Uneven or limited contributions	Disorganized or dominated by one voice
Application and Relevance	Thoughtful connections to modern or personal contexts	Clear contemporary relevance	Limited or surface-level relevance	No real-world connection
Production Quality	Clear, polished audio and professional tone	Mostly clear and organized	Some clarity or pacing issues	Poor quality or distracting errors

Extension Options

1. **Ethical Roundtable Series:** Compile episodes into a class podcast series featuring different moral questions across time and cultures.
2. **Debate Edition:** Transform the episode into a structured debate, with rebuttals and concluding reflections.
3. **Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration:** Partner with history, civics, or literature units to connect ethics to major texts or events studied in class.
4. **Contemporary Voices Episode:** Include short audio clips or quotations from philosophers, activists, or news sources to situate classical ideas in today's world.