

Lesson 4**Using violence****Is using violence acceptable in some cases?**

Learning objective	Develop critical thinking about the acceptability of the use of violence and about personal behaviour.
Student tasks	Reflect upon use of violence and upon personal behaviour.
Resources	Cards or strips of paper with cases from student handout 4.4. for each group. (The teacher needs to have some information on the judicial system of conflict resolution in the country.)
Method	Small group work. Critical thinking.

Information box

Though a peaceful world is seen as the ultimate goal, neither international human rights law nor international humanitarian law excludes the use of violence in absolute terms. This lesson aims to contribute to the students' critical thinking about the legitimacy of the use of violence in specific cases. Students are asked to reflect upon their personal behaviour with regard to violence used by themselves or by others in their environment.

The lesson

The class is divided in working groups of four or five. A student or the teacher presents case 1 from student handout 4.4.

It might be too difficult to deal with all four cases in one lesson. The teacher therefore could decide to give different cases to different groups, to choose only two of the four cases or to add another lesson.

The task of the group is to discuss the case, using the questions given on the card, and to present their response orally. The teacher needs to be aware that the fundamental question being explored is to what extent the use of violence should be accepted. After each group has responded, the teacher can give some additional information related to the case before giving out the next case.

Teacher's copy of cases, questions and additional information

Case 1

During a demonstration on the issue of anti-globalisation, a small group of people starts throwing stones at the headquarters building of a famous trans-national company. The police force present on the spot sees this taking place and tries to arrest the people involved. During this intervention, a policeman is captured by the people throwing stones and is seriously beaten.

Questions:

1. Would it be acceptable for the police force to use their guns to shoot at the people throwing stones?
2. Would it be acceptable for the police to intervene using machine guns? (This would be faster, but would almost certainly result in more casualties.)
3. Would it be acceptable for the police to wait until they are able to intervene using a water cannon?
4. Would it be acceptable for the police not to intervene by using force, in order to avoid escalation of the conflict?

Information

Following international standards, the police may use force under certain conditions. Force should be used only if necessary and should be in proportion to the aim of the intervention. Should a police officer be ordered by his/her superior to intervene in a way that is clearly in contradiction with this rule, UN rules expect him/her to refuse to carry out the order.

Case 2

Country X declares war on country Y because Y clearly protects and even finances rebel groups operating against country X from within country Y. Country X's intelligence team discovers in which village a group of well-trained and armed rebels are staying, and finds out that they are preparing a major bomb attack on an important industrial target.

Questions:

1. Would it be acceptable for country X to bomb the village heavily, making sure that only a few people, including local inhabitants, survive?
2. Would the former be acceptable after a clear request to the rebels to surrender and a clear warning to the local population to leave the village and to gather in the local sports stadium, where they would be allowed in after being searched for weapons?
3. Would it be acceptable not to intervene by using force? What alternatives can you think of?

Information

International rules (the so-called “Geneva Conventions”) on warfare do not foresee a total ban on the use of military force, but forbid some types of interventions and weapons. One of the principles is that military force should not be used against non-military targets, and should neither be indiscriminate nor disproportionate: for example, serious attempts have to be made to avoid civilian casualties by refraining from using the most powerful bombs against military targets, in situations where less powerful bombs would be sufficient. In this way, civilian casualties and the deaths of innocent parties (so-called “collateral damage”) could be prevented. However, as mentioned above, this does not mean that the “Geneva Conventions” on warfare consider collateral damage unacceptable, but rather that they take it into account to a certain extent.

Case 3

Mr X, a young man working as a technical assistant at the local hospital, regularly beats his wife when he arrives home drunk. His wife once informed the police about the beatings by her husband, which are sometimes serious. The neighbour’s wife, who accidentally became aware of the situation, can now imagine what is going on next door when she hears her neighbours arguing and shouting.

Questions:

1. Should the neighbour’s wife inform the police in such cases, or is that an unacceptable intrusion into her neighbours’ privacy?
2. When they receive information from someone, should the police intervene in these circumstances?

Information

“(…) States should condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination. States should pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating violence against women and, to this end, should:

(a) Consider, where they have not yet done so, ratifying or acceding to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or withdrawing reservations to that convention;

(b) Refrain from engaging in violence against women;

(c) Exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private persons (...).”

From the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993).

Case 4

Leo, 13, is a slim and rather small young boy. He is often bullied by some older boys while he is playing in the local playground. This time, he replies that they should not harass him all the time, and that they are behaving like non-educated, primitive people. As a consequence the older boys start beating him severely. Leo’s friend sees this happening when he enters the playground. Some elderly people also see it happening when they cross the playground on their way back home after buying food at the market.

Questions:

1. Should Leo’s friend intervene in this case? How?
2. Should the elderly people intervene? How?
3. What other solutions would you suggest?

As an additional task, the students could draft a letter to the older boys, in which they explain what they think of the older boys’ behaviour. This could be a task for homework or for groups who work more quickly.