

“Looking Upstream:” Addressing Causes of Gun Violence

PURPOSE

To examine the causes and effects of handgun violence in order to determine ways of bringing about change at a grassroots level.

GRADE LEVELS

All (Modify as Necessary)

CONTENT AREAS

English/Language Arts
Social Studies/Social Science

TIME

45-70 minutes or
One class period

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

- Students will define cause and effect relationships.
- Students will analyze an issue in terms of cause and effect.
- Students will brainstorm possible solutions to a problem.

PSAE/ACT SKILLS

Cause and Effect Relationships
Expressing Judgments and Developing a Position

STANDARDS AND BENCHMARKS

English Language Arts State Goals 3B, 3C, 4A, 5A, 5C
Social Sciences State Goal 18B

LEARNING STYLES

Visual/Spacial
Verbal/Linguistic
Interpersonal
Kinesthetic

MATERIALS

“Looking Upstream” Overhead or Handout
Chart paper
Markers
Construction or art paper and art materials if completing activity in class
Optional Root Cause Template and Teacher Guide

VOCABULARY

Cause
Effect

ASSESSMENT

“Looking Upstream” Sign

ACTIVITIES

Anticipatory Set

Put up an **overhead** of the following story (or tell orally, if you prefer) and ask students to free-write for 3 minutes about what the story made them think, feel, etc. Encourage them to make any connections between the story and their own lives. Share and discuss responses briefly.

LOOKING UPSTREAM

Two teenage boys were fishing by a stream one day when they noticed someone floating downstream. They both jumped in, pulled the person out of the water, gave mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and saved his life. The next day, they were fishing in the same spot and noticed another person floating down the stream. Again, they jumped in and saved that person's life. From then on, people floating downstream happened quite consistently and many died en route to the hospital. The city council decided to build a hospital on that very spot so that they wouldn't have to transport the nearly drowned patients to the nearest hospital, which was eight miles away. The hospital became very busy and began to grow and expand. In fact the hospital became very well known across the country. Many interns came there to serve their residencies.

One day, one of those interns approached the administrator and thanked him for the opportunity to do his internship with the hospital. "There is one thing that bothers me, though. Has anyone ever gone upstream to see why people are falling into the river?" "No," the administrator answered. "We just don't have time. We are too busy treating the victims."

"Well," said the intern. "Isn't it time we took a trip upstream?!"

Lesson:

Student responses and discussion of "Looking Upstream" should have gotten at the idea that societal issues should be addressed where they begin instead of when it is too late. Tell students they will be applying this concept to the issue of handgun violence.

- Ask students to define Cause and Effect and write the terms in their notebooks.
 - **Cause:** the reason a particular event takes place
 - **Effect:** what happens as a result of the event
- On the board or on chart paper, draw a large tree. In the trunk of the tree, write "Gun Violence." Ask a volunteer to write as the rest of the students provide the responses. Ask students for **effects** of gun violence on society to fill in the foliage section of the tree. Ask students to consider the consequences for the perpetrators, the victims, the families and friends of both, and the surrounding communities. (Possible answers: death, fear at school, bad reputation for family or community, businesses leave area, families torn apart, perpetrator doesn't finish school, goes to prison, can't get a job, families and friends seek revenge and more violence occurs, etc.)
- Switch student writers and next ask students for the **causes** of gun violence and write these in the roots area. (Possible answers include gangs, fear of others (racism, classism, etc.), lack of conflict-resolution skills, need money or drugs, peer-pressure, no healthy outlets for emotions—sports, hobbies, etc.)
- Switch writers once more and ask students to dig deeper to **causes** behind the ones they already named. (examples: lack of education and career opportunities, bad economy, no love or support system at home)

View a sample tree diagram on chart paper in the resource section below or click here to access the [teacher guide](#).

*Variations:

Accommodate **kinesthetic learners**. Draw only a tree trunk and provide students with cut-outs of the roots and leaves to write the causes and effects on. Students can tape these to the tree trunk so the entire exercise is more interactive and encourages everyone to participate.

For more advanced, independent learners, use the optional [Root Cause Template](#) and have students work independently or in small groups to complete the sections. Refer to the [Teacher Guide](#) for ideas.

Ask **Honors** students to take this to the next level and look beyond the roots to the “soil content.” In other words, if they listed “gangs” as one of the causes of gun violence, ask them to further consider which factors might cause a young person to join a gang.

Debrief/Assessment:

- Have students focus on the roots area of the diagram and consider the “Looking Upstream” story again. Students should complete a think-pair-share (see resource section for description) with possible suggestions for addressing the *causes* of gun violence in their communities.
- Compile a list of the suggestions offered and ask students to select one suggestion to create a sign about for homework. In their sign, they should state the idea to combat the causes of youth violence neatly and creatively as well as include illustrations (photographs, magazine cutouts, drawings, etc.) to support their message. Feel free to use the simple rubric below in the resources section to assess the posters. To access printable versions of the rubric with multiples per page, [click here](#). The resource section also has suggested extension activities for these projects.

RESOURCES:

What Is Think-Pair-Share?

Think-Pair-Share is a cooperative discussion strategy developed by Frank Lyman and his colleagues in Maryland. It gets its name from the three stages of student action, with emphasis on what students are to be **DOING** at each of those stages.

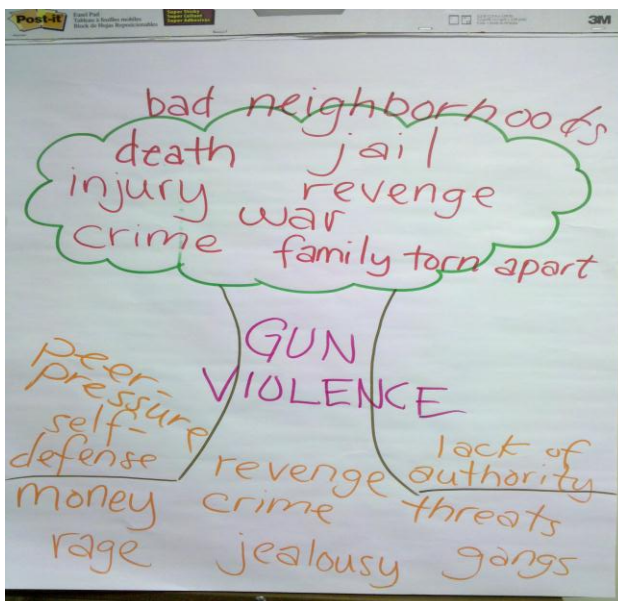
How Does It Work?

1) Think. Provoke students' thinking with a question or prompt or observation. The students should take a few moments (a minute or so) just to **THINK** about the question. You may wish to have them write instead of just thinking silently depending on your group of students.

2) Pair. Using designated partners, nearby neighbors, or a deskmate, students **PAIR** up to talk about the answer each came up with. They compare their mental or written notes and identify the answers they think are best, most convincing, or most unique. Encourage students to ask each other for elaboration or clarification and to add onto each other's points.

3) Share. After students talk in pairs for 1-2 minutes, the teacher calls for pairs to **SHARE** their thinking with the rest of the class. You can do this by going around in round-robin fashion, calling on each pair; or you can take answers as they are called out (or as hands are raised). Often, the teacher or a designated helper will record these responses on the board, overhead, or chart paper.

Sample Tree Diagram:



Rubric: Looking Upstream Sign

	A	B	C
5	Suggestion is a reasonable approach to addressing the causes of gun violence	Illustrations are creative, neat, and support the message of the sign	On the back of the sign, includes which root cause of gun violence is being addressed
3	Suggestion doesn't directly address the causes of gun violence	Illustrations support the message of the sign but lack creativity/neatness	Root cause being addressed is listed but doesn't match up with suggestion on sign
1	No clear suggestion or unreasonable for addressing causes of gun violence	No illustrations or illustrations are not related to the message of the sign	No indication of root cause being addressed by sign

Total Points Possible: 15

Suggestions for Extension Activities:

1. Have students vote on the best signs, make photocopies and distribute as fliers around the community or school to promote awareness.
2. Have students write editorials to accompany their signs and mail them to local newspapers.
3. Ask colleagues if students can visit their classrooms to present their sign and spread their messages about addressing the causes of gun violence.
4. Have students write letters and send them with their signs to their legislators. **Click here** for information about writing these types of letters and to access contact information for your representatives.
5. Laminate and bind all of the students' signs into a book to show to classroom visitors and for each student to bring home to their families to promote changes at home.