

Adapted from William M. Timpson, Edward J. Brantmeier, Nathalie Kees Tom Cavanagh, Claire McGlynn and Elavie Ndura-Ouédraogo (2009) *147 Practical Tips for Teaching Peace and Reconciliation*. Madison, WI: Atwood

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

There is much to draw on to criticize traditional approaches to justice. With high recidivism rates, the likelihood that those already in jail will, after release, return to jail raises serious questions about our notions of prison rehabilitation. In the U.S., high rates of incarceration generally, and of minority males in particular, underscore wasted lives, and lost opportunities. For example, while U.S. prisons overflow with those convicted of drug use, other nations have chosen to treat addiction as a medical problem and use their health professionals. What we learn from Maori and the institutionalization of restorative justice in New Zealand is the value of an emphasis on learning and the restoration of harmony so that those who have committed crimes or hurt others admit to their errors, ask for forgiveness, learn from the victim and others how their actions caused harm, and then agree to some form of community service to repair the damage done. We can see similar processes at work in South Africa as that country emerged from years of violence, in part, through the activities of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its exchange of amnesty for truth telling about wrong doing. In essence, the nation learned about the horrific toll of a state-imposed apartheid as victims and families on both sides of the political divide had an opportunity to tell their stories and hear a plea for forgiveness from their tormentors. Lessons of violence were translated into processes of reconciliation so that the nation could move forward toward a peaceful and inclusive future. We see similar processes among some Native American groups in the United States.

62. Shift from Retributive to Restorative Justice as a Means of Reconciliation

In *No Future without Forgiveness*, Bishop Desmond Tutu (1999) describes how his native country of South Africa used the Truth and Reconciliation Trials to shift away from a legalistic pursuit of justice and punishment as was evident during the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi leaders after World War Two. Instead, amnesty was offered to many of those who had committed the crimes of apartheid in South Africa, a system of state control and terror that was used to suppress the majority black population, as well as those crimes that were committed in retaliation by various guerilla factions.

In practice, this meant a trade off of justice for healing, reparations, and education as perpetrators came forward to tell openly of their crimes without the mediation of courts, lawyers, judges, the rules of law, and arguments about guilt or innocence. The entire nation of South Africa heard directly from those who committed these atrocities and how the government had condoned, ordered, or provoked these crimes.

Tutu writes about extending these lessons learned about forgiveness to other nations: “A year after the genocide of 1994 in Rwanda, when at least half a million people were

massacred, I visited that blighted land. . . I told them that the cycle of reprisal and counter reprisal that had characterized their national history had to be broken and that the only way to do that was to go beyond retributive justice to restorative justice, to move on to forgiveness, because without it there was no future” (257, 260).

Revisit what we know about the Abu Ghraib prison scandal during the U.S. led war in Iraq. Research and list the “punishments” that were meted out to those military personnel who were convicted. Now brainstorm what would be different if a “restorative model” had been followed and the focus shifted to healing, reparations, and education.

63. Forgive and Honor Memories

Reconciliation can be difficult, especially when the wounds are deep. Forgiving acts of violence can be especially challenging, for individuals, groups, and nations. Andrea Taylor has had much to reconcile and forgive. She is an experienced teacher, school leader and innovator, professional artist, a great grandmother, and a doctoral student when she wrote this: “*Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.*” This opening line from Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* has come back to me many times since I first read it years ago. As a child I longed for the security and nurturing that I thought my friends had—whether they actually did or not. Both my parents were alcoholic and ended up divorcing when I was 10: my mom moved away and my dad married one woman after another, trying to find someone to raise me and my little sister, I think. I witnessed domestic violence, felt the pain of abandonment, and experienced loss that no child should have to. I literally cried myself through childhood. Both parents died young in today’s standards. But before they did, I came to terms with my pain by facing what their choices had done to my early life and simply forgave them.

“The one thing I remember (and I have so few *real* memories of my early years with my mother) was that when we were little she made us Jell-O Not just any Jell-O, though; it was lime Jell-O with whipped cream, crushed pineapple, and walnuts. When my children were young, in an act of honoring her, I made it for them. It has developed into a family tradition now and my children are making it for theirs. Such a small thing—Jell-O. Such a big thing—forgiveness.”

Identify those simple acts and experiences that you associate with someone you need to forgive. Practice, teach and model that forgiveness to others.

64. Imagine Possibilities and Act

Violence can destroy possibilities and cripple the spirit. Yet, somehow, people do survive, finding hope and inspiration in different places, their creativity rekindled. Andrea Taylor has learned many lessons from a childhood that left her too often traumatized. In particular, she has found so many new and positive experiences through an exploration of creative outlets. “I like to remember the line from George Elliot, ‘It is never too late to be what you might have been.’ As an injured or neglected person progresses through Maslow’s (1959) hierarchy of human needs, something begins to happen, unexpected things, wonderful things. Von Oech (1986) talks about the four roles

involved in the creative process—explorer, artist, judge, and warrior—and it is at the point of Maslow’s highest stage of “self-actualization” that they can spontaneously appear.

“For me, it was the artist. I began to imagine possibilities and to act on them. I had not sensed any creativity in me during my turbulent childhood, into adolescence, or well in to my adult life. Then one day it happened. I began to paint—simple, focused watercolor. This demonstration of deep heart-healing has brought about a wonderful new dimension to my life. I have met new friends. I have ventured out into new territory—hanging my paintings in public places, selling them to people across the country! As a teacher, I believe that what I do must reach further than the thing just done. It is my hope that I can reach those students who need my help to become who ‘they might have been!’”

When has creative exploration helped you move past old hurts and seen new possibilities? When have you helped others take those first steps?

65. Restore Hope and Instill Motivation

Conflicts can traumatize the strongest of spirits. Yet, somehow people can also learn the lessons that help define their character. Andrea Taylor learned about hope and motivation by surviving through some very tough circumstances. She vividly remembers the time when she was stopped short by something she had seen in a novel by Marilyn French: “You don’t have to shoot a woman to kill her; all you have to do—is marry her.” When I read this line many years ago, I dropped my head into my hands and wept—right there in front of everyone. That is what it felt like to me. After an emotionally blighted childhood, I found myself pregnant at sixteen, then married, and later abandoned with three little ones to raise on my own. For many, that might be the end, but not for me.

“With a deep desire for something more, I pressed through the natural tendencies to give up and just let life happen. I passed the test and received a GED, relocated to a college town and found a job on campus. After 17 years of working and going to school, I earned a BA in English with teaching credentials. Within a few months of graduating from college, I remarried and relocated to the Seattle area with a new and blended family. Within two years I was working with street kids in Seattle’s inner city in a junior and senior high school that I founded. The kids in our school desperately needed that deep desire that I had felt many years ago. It became our stated mission *to restore hope* to their hearts and *instill motivation* to their minds so that they, too, could press through and find another kind of life. The school is now in its 19th year.”

Make a list of those experiences that have helped restore hope for you. Who has helped motivate you to “press through” tough times and leave something of lasting value?

66. Help Restore Happiness and Create Fulfilling Lives

As Nel Noddings (2003) suggests in her book, *Happiness and Education*, at the present time educators and those interested in education are focusing on financial aims in

schools—educating students to support a strong economy and to be financially successful rather than to flourish as adults. And we need to remember the key to what helps us to flourish is living happy, peaceful, and fulfilling lives. Tom Cavanagh writes: “I suggest if we want our children to be happy and flourish as adults, then we need to ask them what makes them happy and help them learn how to build healthy relationships and heal broken relationships”

Using the Peacemaking Circle process (with a talking stick) let us take the time to ask the students we teach what makes them happy and listen to their answers.

67. Understand Indigenous Conceptions of Caring

The idea of caring is closely associated with peace and reconciliation. Nel Noddings is well known for her work regarding how teachers can create a caring environment in their classrooms. Tom Cavanagh has studied restorative practices in New Zealand and found a fascinating variation of this culture of care. “An indigenous colleague helped me understand caring from an indigenous perspective. This respected Maori scholar told me two Maori words describe this deeper understanding of caring—*manaakitanga* and *mana motuhake*. In this context I understand *manaakitanga* to mean the responsibility of the host to care for the well being of the visitor, that is, to entertain, to look after, and to offer an invitation to the visitor to experience hospitality. *Mana motuhake* was a phrase used by Maori political activists in the 1980s to combine the words relating to power and independence into a phrase meaning self-determination or autonomy.”

Clearly the idea of teacher as “host” has a very different connotation than teacher as task-master, disciplinarian, or standard bearer. The question we can ask is how other Maori cultural understandings of caring can help deepen our conceptualization of how we create peaceful, caring relationships in classrooms. You can learn more about these ideas by reading Bishop and Berryman’s (2006) book, *Culture speaks: Cultural relationships and classroom learning*.

68. Promote Restorative Justice and Violence Reduction

Many of us talk about peace education and restorative justice, but not everyone practices it daily as Wendy Cohen does. The life of Wendy Cohen’s daughter Lacy was taken in a violent murder in 2003 when Lacy was 21 and working toward her teaching license at the University of Northern Colorado. Since that time, Wendy has spent her energy and resources forging an incredible journey of restorative justice and violence reduction in honor of the life of her daughter.

One of Wendy’s first acts of restorative justice was when she asked the court to consider life imprisonment for her daughter’s killer instead of the death penalty. As they left court that day, Wendy reached out to the mother of Lacy’s killer and hugged her, realizing that both mothers had lost a child. Wendy and James Clausen, the brother of Lacy’s killer, have spent the past several years speaking together publicly about the experiences and

losses of the family of the victim and the perpetrator. No one is left unaffected by acts of violence, or by their presentations.

Wendy has also created 2 Hearts: The Lacy Jo Miller Foundation and a school called 2Hearts Academy. The students in her school are often referred from the juvenile justice system or have not been successful in the public schools for a variety of reasons. The curriculum for the school has been developed out of Wendy's 20+ years as a teacher of high-risk children. It focuses on violence reduction and restorative justice through providing knowledge and information, expanding students' choices, improving self-esteem and decision making skills, and providing service to the school and community. Creating a safe and nurturing environment where students feel respected and welcomed is at the foundation of the school's success.

Have participants read some of the other offerings at the www.2Hearts4Lacy.org website. Follow up with a discussion related to the following questions. How would you have reacted if you were Wendy? How would you have reacted if you were the brother, sister, mother, or father of Lacy's killer? What role can community service play in violence reduction and restorative justice?

69. Practice *Ifoga* and Promote Reconciliation

In Samoan culture the answer to dispute healing (rather than resolution) is *ifoga*. *Ifoga* is a ceremony in which an apology in the *faasamoa* or Samoan way is offered. This ceremony involves the village rather than an individual. This apology is offered to the person harmed and to their family or village. Considered to be an act of reconciliation, *ifoga* literally means an act of bowing down. The purpose of *ifoga* is to avoid retribution and to maintain peace (Tuala-Warren 2002).

While engaging in *ifoga* is only appropriate in Samoan culture, as Western people we can learn from this powerful Samoan ritual. First of all, apology is an important part of reconciliation. Secondly, the harm caused by disputes or conflicts affects the whole village or community, not just an individual.

Western educators might well ask themselves—Do we make space for people to offer apology to the people harmed, and do we think broadly about the ripple effect of harm? When we respond to disputes or conflicts by avoidance, elimination, or asking an expert to solve the problem, we remove the opportunity for apology and reconciliation. How can we respond to disputes and conflicts in a way that allows for and encourages apology?

70. Establish Truth and Reconciliation Commissions

In *No Future Without Forgiveness*, South African Bishop Desmond Tutu (1999) describes the process by which those who had committed "political crimes" or had acted "under orders" from a superior, typically within the police or other state security apparatus, could apply for amnesty from prosecution if they told the truth and asked for forgiveness. Above all, Tutu, Mandela and other leaders wanted to educate the nation and

Formatted: Not Highlight

the world about the horrors of apartheid. Establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was the mechanism.

Tutu writes about one case: “Five police officers, in amnesty applications that detailed the killings of dozens of people from the Pretoria region, described how they had tortured their ‘terrorist’ quarry and how they had then disposed of the bodies. . . You are devastated by the fact that it could be possible at all for human beings to shoot and kill a fellow human being, burn his body on a pyre, and while this cremation is going on actually enjoy a barbecue on the side. What had happened to their humanity that they could do this? . . . In many cases in the Eastern Cape, people vanished without trace as a result of their bodies being burned to ashes. . . Nevertheless the full story of the killing, . . . and in particular the identities of the killers, emerged only when the commission was set up” (126, 130).

What historical events in your lifetime would benefit from something like a public “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” hearing? How can “state terror”, in particular—e.g., police riots, torture, illegal covert actions—as occurred in South Africa be made public and new preventative policies enacted? What events in the life of your school, college or organization could benefit from greater openness and transparency?

71. Remember the Past and Do Something to Promote Reconciliation

Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999) reports on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that he chaired as South Africa tried to heal from the ravages of apartheid. He describes the difficult and tortuous path that the commission tried to walk in addressing the horrors of the past with honesty, reparations, and sensitivity while simultaneously hoping that forgiveness would be possible as a foundation for an inclusive future.

Tutu writes: “Many white people in South Africa have come to see themselves as entitled to reconciliation and forgiveness without their having to lift so much as a little finger to aid this crucial and demanding process. This is a broad generalization, which in the way of generalizations does not do justice to those whites who have been outstanding in their commitment to justice and who were in the thick of things in the dark days of apartheid’s awful repression. Many of those in this distinguished group had to run the gauntlet of the hostility of their white community. They faced ostracism and frequently had to suffer the sort of harassment and vilification, and sometimes detention and torture, that were the lot of those who dared to stand up to be counted, who were willing to swim against the current in a country where all this was anathema. Their contribution was incalculable and indispensable, and I want to pay them all a very richly deserved and warm tribute. Having said that, I have sadly to note that a very large section of the white community have forgotten, far too easily and far too soon, that our country was indeed on the verge of catastrophe which could have seen us overwhelmed by the kind of carnage and unrest that have characterized places such as Bosnia, Kosovo, the Middle East, and Northern Ireland” (164).

What historical events or periods can you identify where the majority population was “too quick” to forget its role in repression and too neglectful of the sacrifices that had to be made? For example, many Americans, both white and black, seem to have forgotten how Martin Luther King Jr., now mythologized as an iconic champion of Civil Rights and nonviolence, was vilified for taking the fight for integration into the North, for extending the movement to include poor people, and for coming out against the war in Vietnam. Yet, at the same time, King was considered “safer” than other more militant blacks like Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and the Black Panthers. What historical events in your school, university, or organization should be revisited because too many are too quick to forget problems that may still require attention?

72. Maintain Positive and Peaceful Relationships

Larry Brendtro (2006) tells us that students that cause educators the most trouble are often “kids in pain.” Bullies often mask their insecurities with aggression and violence. He has based his work on the extensive research of James Anglin (2003). What Brendtro says is that these “kids in pain” suffer from “deep and pervasive psycho-emotional pain.” As a result they have developed counterproductive and self-defeating behaviors. Our tendency as educators is to react to these behaviors by inflicting even more pain into their lives as punishment in the hopes it will stop the offending behavior. However, this reaction feeds an emotional reaction (ER) cycle that is pain-based and ineffective. Zero tolerance policies are typical of this approach to discipline.

Brendtro suggests that the effective way to respond to the misbehavior of these “kids in pain” is by “developing and maintaining positive relationships.” By using the power of empathy and building the capacity (resilience) of these young people, educators can create restorative changes in them and begin to heal their long-standing wounds. To paraphrase Archbishop Desmond Tutu: We must look on children in need as potential sources of important information if given the opportunity to tell us.

Stephanie King offers this improbable but sweet story as a reminder of what is possible when disaster strikes and the needs are great. “It is easy and comforting to spend time with familiar company. Reaching out of our comfort zones to encounter new and different people can be scary and can take such great effort. Yet, opening to new possibilities by making friends with people with whom we generally would not spend time can broaden our horizons, teach us about other people and ourselves, and bring new sources of peace and love into our lives.

“In *Owen and Mzee* (Hatkoff, Hatkoff and Kahumbu 2006), we can read the amazing but true story of a 130-year old giant tortoise (Mzee) who cares for a baby hippopotamus (Owen). After Owen is separated from his family during a tsunami, he and Mzee find themselves together in captivity where they develop a most unlikely friendship. Before meeting Owen, Mzee seemed content to live alone, maintaining almost an antisocial existence. Baby Owen, however, needed a mother to care for him. While no one would have expected these two creatures to bond so deeply, each found something necessary in the other.”

Ask yourself: How can I develop a positive relationship with a student who obviously is a “kid in pain”? How can I make peace and reconcile with anyone in pain? What has been your own experience with others when you were “in pain”?

73. Reconcile and Restore

Bill Timpson likes to keep his skills sharp for teaching about peace and reconciliation by volunteering with the Restorative Justice Program in his hometown of Fort Collins, Colorado. At monthly “Restore” sessions on Saturday mornings, first time offenders can elect to have their police record for shoplifting exonerated if they admit their guilt, join a Restorative Justice circle with peers, parents and members of the community, and complete some agreed upon community service activities intended to help “restore” the damage done. The data for this program tell a remarkable story of the power of learning over punishment, of an emphasis on reconciliation. While U.S. recidivism rates for those in jail typically mean that over 60% of prisoners return to prison, of those who elect to participate in the Fort Collins’ “Restore” Program only 2% are ever arrested for shoplifting again.

And the lessons learned? For one, many learn that “wants” and “needs” are very different; these kids may want some new stylish outfit or the latest CD but in the circle of restorative justice they learn that these are very different from what they really need. We often talk about the pressures of a materialistic culture that equates self worth and possessions. For another lesson, many also learn that there is usually a ripple effect for their actions, that family and friends are impacted by their selfish acts. Having a parent in the circle can begin the process of rebuilding trust. We talk about the developmental shift that happens when young people begin to mature out of their preoccupation with themselves. The lessons for peace and reconciliation are clear: (1) open and honest communication is essential; (2) where judgment and punishment can be crippling, learning can be liberating; (3) where trust has been broken, honest self-assessment and a desire to change course can begin to repair the harm caused and rebuild relationships.

Look into restorative justice programs in your own community. If none exists, look into starting one. Contact your local police or court officials to see if there is interest. Or find other volunteer opportunities where you can use these skills of listening, acceptance, collective support, and care.

When teaching her graduate classes, Ellyn Dickmann likes to address any simmering conflicts among her students through the use of “tension tables.” She writes: “This activity provides a supportive and safe classroom environment to address tensions between students. Oftentimes tensions emerge as a result of cultural, political, or social differences and/or misunderstandings.

Below is an example that outlines the 4 key steps of how I utilized Tension Tables in a graduate level leadership development course.

“Step One—Introduce the Concept: At the start of the semester I introduced the concept of Tension Tables as a way to create a safe listening opportunity and a time for understanding. I reinforced that addressing tensions is necessary for healthy debates to emerge and also provides an opportunity to enhance learning.

“Step Two—Observe and Reflect: During the second and third weeks of the semester I began to observe a division in the classroom between students from the “education world” and “business and industry world.” I took time outside of class to reflect on where the conflict was and created a list of potential reasons. There was frequent use of dismissive body language and comments passed back and forth between the worlds as leadership theories and concepts were presented and discussed. In addition, the class had created “camps” with the “education world” on one side of the room and the “business and industry world” on the other.

“Step Three—Set Up Tables: During the fourth week of class I started the class by sharing my observations of the class tensions and created 3 tables that had representatives from both worlds. I created three different sets of questions (one set for each table) that explored the topics of tension. A critical component of setting these tables up was allowing enough class time for in-depth conversation and sharing. In this case I allowed a full hour for the discussions and reporting out.

“Step Four—Reporting Out of Discussions: I rotated from table to table during the hour of discussions and added to the dialogue when necessary. At the end of the hour I asked each table to report out on what they learned as well as how it felt to talk about the areas of tension that the questions addressed. As each table reported out I made comments and discussed openly how I viewed this activity as a strategy to discuss future areas of tension.

“Overall the students found the Tension Table strategy to be helpful and asked for these opportunities as the semester progressed.”

Experiment with this and other ways to model constructive and creative management of conflicts among your students. You will need time but the benefits may prove worthwhile in the long run.

74. Differentiate between Wants and Needs

Conflict erupts most often between groups of people because one or both feel they have critical and long-lasting needs that have been overlooked and because they somehow associate the “other group” as the obstacle that has prevented those needs from being fulfilled. The need for validation of one’s humanity, for equitable access to resources and opportunity, and for voice and choice are at the root of enduring conflict and violence in many nations and communities throughout the world. Teaching peace should thus include creating safe spaces where such needs and wants can be shared and clarified, without judgment.

Elavie Ndura is a peace scholar who survived the genocide in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. She writes: “In my multicultural education classes, I engage my students in an intimate discussion of their wants and needs in a culminating session after discussions of race and racism, religious diversity, gender and sexism, social class and economic equity, and the social impacts of wide-spread intolerance and inequity. I use the following discussion prompt: ‘As a member of a particular race or ethnicity, what do you want members of other races or ethnic groups to do in order for you to prosper in this multicultural world?’ I further instruct my students to ‘Please control your emotions and listen without interrupting.’

“As the students take turns voicing their needs and wants, a powerful silence fills their shared space where truth is uncovered in its full authenticity, unchallenged, uninterpreted, a transformative moment for all participants. The session closes with the participants taking turns, again in deep silence, sharing the messages that they have heard, and how these messages will shape their future attitudes and behaviors in relation to people from different racial and ethnic groups.”

75. Challenge the Language of Conflict

When she was a doctoral student reading Deborah Tannen’s (1998) *The Argument Culture*, Stephanie Moyers wondered if the language of “doctoral defense” establishes a potentially unhealthy and unnecessarily adversarial expectation between student and committee. She also wondered if there was some connection between the fear of the defense that many students report and the numbers of ABD (All But Dissertation) students who seem to have stopped short of completion. “As I get closer to writing my dissertation, the idea of having to participate in a defense feels really intimidating because of my perception of the culture of critique being central to the process. According to my reading of McKeachie and Svinicki (2006), I know that fear can be a barrier to discussions because students are often uncertain of the response they will receive from professors and peers, or they are afraid of being embarrassed. When this happens, the safe learning environment can be destroyed and work will need to be done to rebuild the respect and trust necessary for students to feel success” (Palmer 1998; Kees 2003).

Moyers continues: “I agree with Tannen (1998) that we need to move from debate to dialogue and find creative ways to express disagreements. Would it be possible to creatively change the label of dissertation defense to something that creates a more peaceful space than one that is characterized by animosity before the student even begins to present his or her research? Would it be considered less academic if it is not labeled a dissertation defense? In class, we wondered if it would help to re-label the traditional ‘defense’ as ‘presentation, critique and evaluation?’ Or if ‘mock’ or practice presentations would help deescalate anxieties.”

Examine the language that describes your work or study for evidence of presumed conflict. You could also explore other possibilities that emphasize dialogue, listening, and

empathy.

76. Find Peace in Every Patch of Natural Area

Kellee Timpson has written a very personal essay for the book, *From Battleground to Common Ground: Stories of Conflict, Reconciliation, and Place*. “Wherever I have lived, when I am out walking my dog, I am bound to stumble across walking trails, greenways and pocket parks tucked into the neighborhood. These green spaces are easily overlooked when driving by and, even if noticed, seem too small to be significant, let alone worth driving any distance to visit. Walking my dog is my excuse to spend time outdoors and, even in these small natural areas, I usually feel more relaxed, no matter what kind of day it has been. My point is that it doesn’t have to be Yosemite or the Grand Canyon. Left to itself, even the smallest patches of ‘wild’ hums along and goes about the natural business of living. The trees and shrubs do their best to hide the signs of urban, built environments, especially in the wilds of the western Washington. And here, away from cars whizzing by, I enjoy a quiet moment watching water cascade over rocks, birds flit from tree to tree, and insects buzz from flower to shrub. Here, I feel satisfied with a renewed sense of place and purpose among the grasses, trees and birds” (Timpson, Valdez and Giffey forthcoming 2009).

Identify natural areas near where you live and work. Over a period of time, remind yourself to visit each and find something “inspiring”—a tree or bush, a leaf, the grass, a rock formation or a patch of dirt, birds, insects or the sky above. Make it a peaceful, even a meditative moment. Remember to focus on your breathing.

77. Take the Third Side

In *The Third Side*, Bill Ury (1999) describes what it means to take a proactive role in a dispute, a role that has its own risks but significant potential benefits as well. Indeed, the risks of inaction, of doing nothing, are often tragic. “The *third side* implies a new responsibility. . . We may not think of ourselves as third parties; indeed, we generally don’t. Yet, each of us has the opportunity to help stop destructive fights around us. We constitute the family, the friends, the colleagues, the neighbors, the onlookers, the witnesses. Even when no third party is present, each of us can choose to mediate our own disputes by taking the third side” (23).

Ury continues but with some cautions: “Taking the third side is not an easy responsibility. It consumes time and energy. Those who step into the middle can find themselves criticized by one party or both for ‘interfering’ or ‘meddling.’ In potentially violent situations, thirdsiders may even run the risk of physical harm. As fighting, however, jeopardizes the happiness of our families, the productivity of our workplace, and the safety of our communities, it is increasingly in our own self-interest to act as thirdsiders. We are all stakeholders in the conflicts around us. In short, the third side is not some mysterious or special other. The third side is us—each of us acting individually and all of us working together. When it comes to stopping fights, the missing key is in our hands” (24).

Analyze the conflicts you have seen up close. What “third side” role did you or someone else play? What role could you or others have played?