

HERE NOW / THERE THEN

A routine for considering presentist attitudes and judgments

1. Identify a controversial issue or fairness topic that has changed significantly over time and uncover student's basic knowledge about the topic.
 - ◆ Column A: List present stances, values and judgments about the topic.
2. Ask kids to imagine they could travel back to a time when the attitudes about the fairness of this topic were different.
 - ◆ Column B: List past stances, values and judgments about the topic.
3. Compare the past and present perspectives in Columns A and B.
 - ◆ Why do you think things have changed? Why did people in the past not think the way we do today?
4. Close the discussion.
 - ◆ How could we find out more about the way people thought back then?

Purpose: What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

The routine encourages students to consider past perspectives and develop a better understanding of how thinking changes over time and across cultures. It helps students acknowledge that we have strong stances regarding controversial issues, and that our stances are influenced by social and historical context. It also helps to uncover stereotypical perceptions as well as ethnocentric and presentist judgments.

Application: When and where can it be used?

The routine works best when dealing with issues that at one point in time or in a different culture were considered controversial. It can be used with topics about which we have strong stances that are not necessarily shared by people from other cultures or people in the past. Examples of these topics might include: slavery, holocausts, genocide, human rights, women's rights, child labor, war, and so on. This routine works well when students have had some experience with the topic and have at least a basic knowledge of its historical development.

Launch: What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

This routine works well as a whole class discussion. Use the idea of the time traveler to help students think about fairness issues and values that have changed significantly over time or place. When comparing past and present stances acknowledge that certain issues may not be controversial to us today. List how we think about it presently and ask students to step back and consider how people thought about the topic during another place and time. What was their reasoning? Make these ideas visible. Explore the possible reasons for our shifts in thinking about this topic. Why do we view it differently? How could we find out more information?