

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY NOTES

From Conflict to Peace - The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement - 25 Years On Discussion Activity Notes

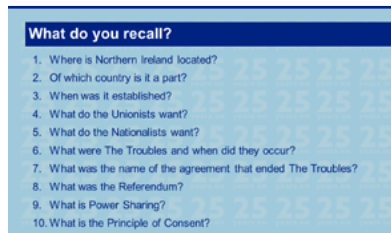
This discussion pack accompanies the secondary level school assembly resource to mark the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement which ended the conflict in Northern Ireland. It is designed to promote follow-on discussion about the Agreement and how it brought about an end to the conflict and led to a successful peace. It provides an opportunity for students to re-watch the video and then to analyse and discuss what issues caused conflict and how specific terms in the Agreement addressed these. There are additional slides at the end giving more historical background to Northern Ireland which you may wish to include at the beginning of this discussion activity to provide students with more supporting knowledge.

There is a suggested final activity to encourage students to demonstrate their understanding of the Agreement and promote it as an example of a successful peace agreement.



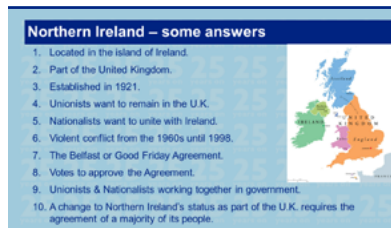
Slide 1 - From Conflict to Peace

The discussion pack is designed to support around 40 minutes to one hour of learning depending on the amount of discussion. The follow-on creative activity is open ended and can take as much time as teachers and students feel they wish to devote to this.



Slide 2 - What do you recall?

This is designed to promote recall of 10 facts from the assembly about Northern Ireland and the Agreement. It can provide an opportunity to clarify student understanding before moving into the analysis and discussion of the issues and terms of the Agreement. There is an accompanying handout sheet for this activity.



Slide 3 - Northern Ireland - some answers

Answers to the 10 recall questions. Allow for discussion and clarification of the points.



Slide 4 - What can we learn about peace-making from The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement?

We have seen in the assembly what The Belfast or Good Friday Agreement is and why it remains so important 25 years after it was signed. Many countries around the world look to Northern Ireland as an example of how to bring peace from conflict. You will have the opportunity to discover more and discuss how the Agreement addressed the causes of that conflict in a follow-on session in your own classes. You will also have the chance to develop your own campaign to mark the 25th anniversary of this Agreement.

Re-watch the video and note down...

1. What issues caused conflict between the two historic communities?
 - These may include events, beliefs or actions taken.
2. What factors helped to bring about the peace agreement?
 - These may include groups, individuals or actions taken.
3. What terms of the agreement solved the issues?
 - These may include new laws, institutions or actions taken.
4. What challenges do you think remain?
 - These may include unanswered issues or factors that have changed.

Slide 5 - Re-watch the video and note down...

These are 4 guidance questions to focus students' observations and thinking while re-watching the video. Discuss the questions in advance of showing the video so that students clearly understand what they need to look out for. We have given some ideas to indicate possible answers. Ensure students have the accompanying note-making sheet before showing the video and encourage them to note-down key words while watching to use as aide-memoires before writing up more detailed responses before discussion.



Slide 6 - Video

Runs for 7 minutes

You can find the video on our YouTube channel here:

<https://youtu.be/VQXBpt5RArY>

Knowledge Share...

1. What issues caused conflict between the two historic communities?
2. What factors helped to bring about the peace agreement?
3. What terms of the agreement solved the issues?
4. What challenges do you think remain?

Slide 7 - Knowledge share

Provide students with an opportunity to complete their notes and then share these in a whole-class knowledge share. This will allow teachers to correct any misunderstanding and enable students to clarify and deepen their notes. They will then use these to help analyse how the Agreement successfully addressed the causes of conflict and provided solutions.

What did the Agreement say?

- There is equal respect for both historic communities and everyone.
- Consent is the foundation of Northern Ireland's status within the U.K. This cannot change without the people's agreement.
- Everyone in Northern Ireland has the right to identify and be accepted as British or Irish, or both. Everyone can have either British or Irish citizenship (including a passport) or both.



Slide 8 - What did the Agreement say?

The Agreement was signed on 10 April 1998 and had three fundamental principles at its core.

- Equal respect for both Unionist and Nationalist communities and others in Northern Ireland. Everyone is entitled to be treated equally and have their views and concerns considered. This is shown in the power-sharing arrangement that means both communities share in the governing of Northern Ireland.
- Consent (the agreement of the people) underpins Northern Ireland's status. It is currently a part of the United Kingdom because a majority of people in Northern Ireland wish it to remain so, but it could become part of Ireland if, in the future, a majority of people wish that change to happen.
- Everyone in Northern Ireland has the right to identify and be accepted as British or Irish, or both, and to hold citizenship and a passport for both countries. There is no restriction on living, working or travelling between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Discuss – How would the below end conflict?

- Equal respect for both historic communities and everyone.
 - Consider issues of discrimination and fear of being in a minority.
- Consent of the people of Northern Ireland.
 - Consider issues of democracy and the right of the people to decide.
- Right to identify as British or Irish.
 - Consider issues of identity and belonging.

Slide 9 – Discuss - How would the below end conflict?

Begin by indicating that the principle of Respect is at the foundation of the whole Agreement and that this needs to be the basis of the discussions that students have too. They must allow each other to speak and to listen to each other's views even if they disagree with them.

Take each of the three fundamental principles on the previous slide and discuss how they address the issues that were raised in the video. It is intended that students will understand that the principles of Respect, Consent and Identity are fundamental to peace-making.

Some suggestions have been provided for discussing each of the principles and students may respond to these with examples of their own experience (whether they are from Northern Ireland or elsewhere).

What did the Agreement do?

It created three new sets of bodies

1. Within Northern Ireland – The Assembly and Executive make laws and decisions on everyday life.
2. Between the North & South – bodies that support co-operation between Northern Ireland and Ireland.
3. Between the East & West – bodies that support co-operation between the United Kingdom and Ireland.



Slide 10 – What did the Agreement do?

The Agreement set up 3 new sets (or strands) of political structures related to the governing of Northern-Ireland, relations between North and South (Northern Ireland and Ireland) and relations between East and West (United Kingdom and Ireland). These bodies are designed to develop closer working relationships between the two historic communities within Northern Ireland; the two parts of Ireland; and between the U.K. and Ireland.

- Strand One established the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive to make laws and decisions on most of the issues affecting everyday life in Northern Ireland.
- Strand Two established the North-South institutions - the North-South Ministerial Council and the North-South Implementation Bodies - that support co-operation between Northern Ireland and Ireland.
- Strand Three established the East-West institutions - the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the British-Irish Council - that support co-operation between the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Discuss – How would the below end conflict?

- An elected Assembly and Government that has representatives from Unionist and Nationalist parties.
- Consider issues of discrimination and fear of being in a minority.
- Bodies that support co-operation between Northern Ireland and Ireland.
- Consider issues of democracy and the right of the people to decide.
- Bodies that support co-operation between the U.K. and Ireland.
- Consider issues of identity and belonging.

Slide 11 – Discuss - How would the below end conflict?

Begin by indicating that the second principle of the agreement is Consent which means people being able to give their agreement and approval to decisions that affect them. This means that both communities need to share in how Northern Ireland is governed and so the idea of “power-sharing” is central to this. More details are provided here about each of the bodies that were set up, and some suggestions are included on the slide for discussing how these bodies would ensure that there is consent and representation in the decisions taken that affect people in Northern Ireland and beyond.

- The Assembly is elected using an electoral system based on Proportional Representation so that the share of seats in the assembly is equal to the share of votes that each party receives. This means that no single party has an overall majority, so the Executive (the government) has to have members that represent both communities. The First Minister is the leader of the party which wins the most votes and the Deputy First Minister is the leader of the party which wins the second most votes. These two leaders then work together to form a government that makes laws and decisions on the issues that affect everyday life in Northern Ireland.
- The North-South institutions support co-operation between Northern Ireland and Ireland. The Ministerial Council brings together members of the Northern Ireland Executive and Government of Ireland to discuss matters that affect both. There are also six Implementation Bodies that co-operate on policies for Agriculture, Education, Environment, Health, Tourism and Transport.
- The East-West institutions support co-operation between the U.K. and Ireland. The British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference brings together members of the U.K. and Irish governments to discuss issues such as security, policing, and justice and other issues that require both sides to co-operate. The British-Irish Council brings together representatives of all the governments within Ireland, the U.K. (including Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) and the islands of Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man to co-operate on issues such as transport, the environment and energy.

We have provided some ideas to consider when discussing how these bodies would ensure that there is consent and representation in the decisions taken that affect people in Northern Ireland and beyond.

What else did the Agreement do?

It dealt with several difficult issues:

1. Disbanding of violent groups and the destruction of their weapons.
2. Removal of most of the British Army.
3. Release of prisoners who had been imprisoned for committing violent acts but now agreed to the terms of peace.
4. Reform of the police force to make it representative of both communities.
5. Co-operation between Northern Ireland and Ireland on security.



Slide 12 - What else did the Agreement do?

The Agreement addressed some of the most difficult issues which caused disagreement, and which resulted in violence.

- The armed groups, known as paramilitaries, that used violence had to agree to give up their weapons. This meant that groups like the IRA and the UVF would no longer be able to carry out violent attacks. They also had to agree to disband and accept the principle of consent – that the people of Northern Ireland would decide on its future in a peaceful way.
- At the height of The Troubles around 22,000 British soldiers patrolled Northern Ireland and were assisted by a locally-recruited regiment of 5,300 soldiers called the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) and the police force of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). The number of troops was gradually reduced and since 2007 there are only around 5,000 soldiers, in the local 38th (Irish) Brigade, who have no function in civil security.
- Members of paramilitary groups who had been imprisoned for violent acts and other offences committed before 10 April 1998 were allowed to apply for release if they met certain criteria, most importantly that they were associated with groups that had given up the use of violence and committed to support the Agreement.
- The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) had been the police force in Northern Ireland, and by 1998 around 92% of the 13,000 officers came from the Unionist community, which meant it was very unrepresentative of the population. It also had around three times as many officers for the population compared to police forces in other parts of the U.K. In 2001 a new police force was created called the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). This currently has around 6,900 officers of which around 68% are drawn from the Unionist community and 32% from the Nationalist community.
- The North-South and East-West bodies jointly discuss the security situation and the police and security forces in Northern Ireland, the U.K. and Ireland work together to tackle any threats of violence and terrorism from new paramilitary groups that may try to form.

Discuss – How would the below end conflict?

- Disbanding violent groups and destroying their weapons.
 - Consider issues of violence and fear.
- Removing most of the British troops from Northern Ireland.
 - Consider issues of creating a more normal and peaceful society.
- Releasing prisoners that had committed violent acts.
 - Consider issues of forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Reforming the police force to make it more representative.
 - Consider issues of inclusion and representation.
- Co-operation between Northern Ireland and Ireland on security.
 - Consider issues of mutual support and trust.

Slide 13 – Discuss - How would the below end conflict?

Begin by indicating that Identity is the third key principle of the Agreement, and that ensuring people feel safe to express their identity and not be threatened by violence is essential to a peaceful community. Making everyday life peaceful and “normal” was a key goal of the Agreement and to do this the violent paramilitary groups had to give up weapons and disband. If they agreed, then members of the paramilitaries who had been imprisoned for crimes would be released. The Army would no longer be used to patrol Northern Ireland towns, cities and the countryside and the police force would be reformed to make it more representative. All of the governments of Northern Ireland, the U.K. and Ireland would co-operate more closely to ensure violence did not start again.

To help with discussion some suggestions are included as to how each of these measures would ensure that Northern Ireland remains peaceful. The following definitions may help students discuss these ideas:

- Violence – over 3,500 people were killed during “The Troubles” and many thousands were wounded. The threat of violence was very real.
- Fear – both communities feared each other and were worried that their own religious and political beliefs would not be respected by the other side.
- Normalising society – making everyday life peaceful. During “The Troubles” life in Northern Ireland life was not like other parts of the U.K. and Ireland. Shootings and bombings were regular occurrences so there was a very large police and army presence to try and stop the violent paramilitary groups. It was common to see soldiers patrolling and hearing army helicopters flying overhead. The police force was much more obvious, and the police carried guns. Police stations looked more like fortified army camps. The border between Northern Ireland and Ireland was heavily guarded and checks on anyone crossing it were carried out.
- Forgiveness – deciding to end feelings of resentment and vengeance towards a person or group.
- Reconciliation – to settle differences and agree to work together in a peaceful way
- Inclusion – ensuring people from both communities have access to every part of society and can participate.
- Representation – ensuring that members of both communities have a fair presence in every part of society and their opinions are listened to and taken into account when decisions are made.
- Mutual support – helping each other
- Trust – believing that someone has your best interests at heart.

What can the World learn about peace-making from The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement?

25
years on

THE
NATIONAL
ARCHIVES

Slide 14 - What can the World learn about peace-making from The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement?

We have seen what The Belfast or Good Friday Agreement is and why it remains so important 25 years after it was signed. Many countries around the world look to Northern Ireland as an example of how to bring peace from conflict. Students should now have a good understanding of what the Agreement did and how it solved the causes of conflict. They can demonstrate this by developing their own campaign to mark the 25th anniversary of this Agreement.

Design Your BGFA25 Campaign

Develop a campaign to promote the lessons of peace-making that the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement can teach to other areas of conflict around the world.

1. Identify the key features that brought about peace.
2. Consider how to explain these to the world.
3. Develop a campaign that uses visual, audio and social media.
4. Produce your materials which could include...
 - Posters
 - Animations
 - Social media / video shorts
 - Poetry, songs or other voice artistry

Slide 15 - Design your BGFA25 Campaign

Develop a campaign to promote the lessons of peace-making that the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement can teach to other areas of conflict around the world.

1. Identify the key features that brought about peace.
2. Consider how to explain these to the world.
3. Develop a campaign that uses visual, audio and social media.
4. Produce your materials which could include...
 - Posters
 - Animations
 - Social media / video shorts
 - Poetry, songs or other voice artistry

Additional Historical Background to Northern Ireland

25
years on

THE
NATIONAL
ARCHIVES

Slide 16 - Additional Historical Background to Northern Ireland

These slides provide some additional historical background to the conflict.

British Rule in Ireland

- England, and later Britain, had ruled over part or all of Ireland for nearly 800 years.
- There had always been resistance to this from the Irish with frequent rebellions and uprisings.
 - After one serious uprising in 1798 the Irish Parliament in Dublin was closed down and Ireland was ruled from London.
 - Ireland was formally joined with the U.K. to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.



Slide 17 - British Rule in Ireland

Britain ruled over the island of Ireland for hundreds of years and, during that time, there had, to varying degrees, always been some form of resistance to that rule. This was either demonstrated through violence, or through politicians taking up issues in Parliament.

In 1798 there was a major rebellion against British rule led by Wolfe Tone and the Society of United Irishmen. The rebellion was overthrown and the Irish Parliament in Dublin was closed down. Ireland was made a formal part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801.

Home Rule for Ireland

- From the 1870s to 1914 there was a growing campaign to win Home Rule or self-government for Ireland.
- Irish Nationalists campaigned in Parliament for Home Rule.
 - Militant nationalists known as Republicans also used violence to oppose British rule in Ireland.
 - Ulster Unionists opposed Home Rule in Parliament.
 - Militant unionists known as Loyalists used violence to oppose Irish Home Rule.



Slide 18 - Home rule for Ireland

By the late 19th Century there were two political viewpoints in Ireland.

Irish nationalists, most of them from the majority Catholic population, tried to get Home Rule (or self-government) for Ireland, and this idea gained more and more support in Parliament and became a real possibility during the last decades of the 19th century. MPs in the Irish Parliamentary Party, led by Charles Stewart Parnell and later by John Redmond, had support from many in the British Liberal Party and two attempts at passing an Irish Home Rule Bill nearly succeeded in 1886 and 1893.

There was also a large Protestant minority in Ireland, located largely in the north-eastern province of Ulster, who believed that Ireland should remain a part of the United Kingdom. These Unionists actively resisted calls for Home Rule, fearful that, as a Protestant minority, should Home Rule be granted, they would be ruled by a Catholic majority.

Both sides reached the brink of civil war in 1914. Private armies known as the Irish Volunteers and Ulster Volunteers were prepared to fight for and against the idea of Home Rule for Ireland.

From Home Rule to War 1914-21

Home Rule was eventually granted in 1914 but the First World War halted its introduction.

- In 1916 militant Irish Nationalists led an uprising at Easter but it was put down.
- In 1918 Sinn Fein won most of the Irish seats at the General Election and declared independence for Ireland.
- War broke out with the British and there was fighting with Unionists in the north.
- The 1921 Government of Ireland Act tried to stop the war by promising separate parliaments for North and South.



Slide 19 - From Home Rule to War 1914 - 21

In 1914 the Third Irish Home Rule Bill was passed by Parliament, but its introduction was suspended because of the First World War. In 1916 there was an uprising in Dublin by militant Irish Nationalists who declared Ireland to be independent. The Easter Rising was put down but demands for independence continued.

Sinn Fein, an Irish Nationalist party that demanded full independence from the U.K., won most of the Irish seats at the 1918 General Election. They declared Ireland to be an independent republic and established their own Parliament in Dublin in January 1919 and began to fight a war of independence against the British Army. Violence also broke out between republicans (militant nationalist) and loyalists (militant unionists) in the North. To try and stop Ireland breaking away the U.K. Parliament passed the Government of Ireland Act in 1920 to create separate parliaments for Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland, but the war continued until December 1921.

The Partition of Ireland

Between 1920 and 1922 Ireland became divided into two.

- The Irish Free State – 26 counties were mostly Catholic. In 1949 this became the Republic of Ireland.
- Northern Ireland – 6 counties of Ulster were largely Protestant but with a large Catholic minority. It remained a part of the U.K.
- The three mainly Catholic counties of Ulster joined the south and became independent.



Slide 20 - The Partition of Ireland

In December 1921 Patrick Collins and Arthur Griffiths of Sinn Fein, negotiated a treaty with the U.K. government to end the war. It created the Irish Free State, which was a self-governing country within the British Empire and eventually it became the Republic of Ireland in 1949. However, 6 of the 9 counties in Ulster, which had protestant majorities, had already elected The Parliament of Northern Ireland on 24th May 1921 and these six counties formed Northern Ireland and remained part of the United Kingdom.

Northern Ireland Before "The Troubles"

From 1921 until the 1960s Northern Ireland was relatively peaceful but tensions between the two historic communities remained.

- The government was dominated by Unionists.
- RUC police were mostly Protestant.
- Catholics felt discriminated against in jobs, housing, education and the way elections were held.
- Nationalists began to protest against this unfair treatment.



Slide 21 - Northern Ireland before "The Troubles"

From 1921 until the 1960s Northern Ireland was relatively peaceful but tensions between the two historic communities remained. The Protestant Unionist community wanted to protect their traditions and ensure they maintained control of the government in Northern Ireland which was dominated by Unionists. The voting system was changed from proportional representation, so nationalists had less representation in the parliament and on local councils.

RUC police were mostly Protestant, and the Special Powers Act of 1922 allowed them to ban meetings, parades and newspapers that they considered dangerous. This law was used mainly against members of the Catholic Nationalist community.

Catholics also felt discriminated against in jobs, housing and education. Nationalists began to protest against their unfair treatment. When violence broke out between protestors and the police, this became the beginnings of "The Troubles".