

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY - STUDENT WORKBOOK

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

The assembly presentation and video have given an introduction to The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and why it is so important. This discussion activity will help you discover more about Northern Ireland and how the Agreement brought an end to the conflict and has built a lasting peace.

What do you recall?

How much do you recall from the assembly presentation and video? Here are 10 quick recall questions to test your knowledge about Northern Ireland and The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement.

1. Where is Northern Ireland located?
2. Of which country is it a part?
3. When was it established?
4. What do the Unionists want?
5. What do the Nationalists want?
6. What were The Troubles and when did they occur?
7. What was the name of the agreement that ended The Troubles?
8. What was the Referendum?
9. What is Power Sharing?
10. What is the Principle of Consent?

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

Many countries around the world look to Northern Ireland as an example of how to bring peace from conflict. To understand why the Agreement has been successful we need to know more about what it did and how it addressed the issues that were causing conflict.

Re-watch the video and note down key words to each of the following questions. Then add more detail during the class discussion.

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

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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?

1. Equal respect for both communities.
 - Consider issues of discrimination and fear of being in a minority.

2. Consent of the people of Northern Ireland.
 - Consider issues of democracy and the right of the people to decide.

3. Right to identify as British or Irish.
 - Consider issues of identity and belonging.

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What did the Agreement do?

The Agreement set up 3 new sets (or strands) of political structures 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. 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 the issues that affect 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. 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.
- 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. 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.

Discuss - How would the below end conflict?

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

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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 could these end conflict?

1. Disbanding violent groups and destroying their weapons.
 - Consider issues of violence and fear.

2. Removing most of the British troops from Northern Ireland.
 - Consider issues of creating a more normal and peaceful society.

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3. Releasing prisoners that had committed violent acts.
 - Consider issues of forgiveness and reconciliation.

4. Reforming the police force to make it more representative.
 - Consider issues of inclusion and representation.

5. Co-operation between Northern Ireland and Ireland on security.
 - Consider issues of mutual support and trust.

The following definitions may help you 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 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.

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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. You should now have a good understanding of what the Agreement did and how it solved the causes of conflict. Now is your chance to bring this message to the World by developing your own campaign to mark the 25th anniversary of this Agreement, and 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

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