

Finding Common Ground

Our country is in a time of great strife and political change. However, the only way to make positive change is to listen and learn from each other. A great way to do this is to find common ground. Democratic governments exist to help citizens with differing opinions find common ground- the place where people's thoughts, opinions, and beliefs intersect. Whether it's Congress, your state, or the local town council, elected leaders often have to make trade-offs - giving up some things they favor to gain support for others. In this badge, investigate how our government does this - and how you can, too.

Steps:

Step 1: Get to know someone different from you

Step 2: Make decisions in a group

Step 3: Explore civil debate

Step 4: Understand a compromise

Step 5: Find common ground through mediation

Purpose: When I've earned this badge, I'll know strategies for bringing people together to find common ground.

Step 1: Get to know someone different from you.

Sometimes we make our differences so big we can't see past them. But when you get to know people who aren't exactly like you, you often find they care about many of the same things you do, and that you can find common ground- not by sacrificing or changing what you think, and not by letting injustice go unanswered but, by being open to other perspectives.

Choices- Do One:

- **Difference of background.** Interview someone from another country, region, or town who lives in your community now. Ask them how they came to live in your community, what things were like for them in the place they left, and what things are like now; then share things about your life. Do you have any tips to help them feel at home?
 - **Tip:** With this step, remember to be respectful and thoughtful while asking them questions and be mindful not to use *microaggressions*. Check out the vocab page to learn what a *microaggression* is and to see some examples.
- **Difference of belief.** Find out more about someone with beliefs different from yours. If you have a friend who practices another faith, you might go to services with their family, talk about their traditions, or ask them questions to learn more. Or you might meet with a pastor or a youth group at a different place of worship or an interfaith alliance. You could have a respectful discussion about politics with someone who thinks differently.
 - **Check out the National Interfaith Alliance website to learn more:**
<https://interfaithalliance.org/>
- **Difference of opinion.** Even friends have different opinions- on foods, songs, movies, books, and games to name a few! Find a friend who loves something that's not your favorite, and vice versa. Listen to their reasons and try their favorite thing- and have them

Finding Common Ground

do the same for your favorite. Then share at least two things you do like about each other's favorites.

Step 2: Make decisions in a group.

For this step, do an activity with a group, such as running your Cadette meeting or spending a few hours with your family. The important thing is to make at least six decisions together- when, where, what you'll eat, how long you'll do things, etc. Afterward, talk about the common ground strategy. What trades did you make for the good of the group or to gain what you wanted? How do you think the strategy would work on a government level?

Before you start, pick a choice (together):

- **Use one of the methods from the Decision Methods Key.** Get really familiar with one of the methods so you understand it thoroughly.
- **Use two of the methods.** Try the two your group is most eager to use.
- **Try them all!** Use each of the methods for different decisions throughout the activity. When you have your post-activity discussion, compare the methods. Did you have a favorite? Is everyone's favorite method the same?
 - **More to explore:** Opinion *consensus*. During your activity try coming to *consensus* on something subjective- like the best women's soccer team. The most beautiful place in your area, or the cutest puppy in a picture of a litter. What's it like to find common ground when the "decision" is based purely on opinion?

Decision methods:

- **Majority rules-** Poll your group. Ask everyone in the group for their top three options. Write down the two most popular options then take a vote. The option with the most votes wins!
- **Consensus or compromise-** Your brother wants burgers. You want pizza. You could order a cheeseburger pizza, or you could agree to have burgers this time if you have pizza next time. But you both like tacos. Could you have those instead? Discuss the issue until you arrive at a decision everyone can accept.
- **Pick at random-** Have everyone write their choice on a slip of paper. Put them in a hat and choose one at random. You could also flip a coin or draw straws.

Common ground in court: hung juries

A jury is usually made up of 6-12 people, depending on the type of case. After a jury has listened to the arguments made by both sides, they must decide on a verdict. To give an official "guilty" or "not guilty" response, a majority of the jurors must agree with one another. In most criminal cases, every person on the jury must agree- the vote must be *unanimous*. If a jury can't come to an agreement, it is called a hung jury. A hung jury results in a mistrial, which means the case can be tried again with a new jury.

Finding Common Ground

Step 3: Explore civil debate

A debate is a discussion between people or groups in which they express different opinions about a topic. It's important to know how to use facts and logic to support your opinions and *persuade* others to see things your way. In this step, consider both sides and keep an open mind- that's how common ground is found.

Choices—Do One:

- **Ask an expert to teach you the techniques of debate.** This might be a local politician or a high school or college student on a debate team. You can find an expert by researching online. If you can't meet in person try calling them or using Zoom! Then hold a short debate on an issue you're interested in (see the sidebar for ideas). Afterward, discuss the arguments both sides made and whether you see common ground.
 - **For more fun:** When you hold your debate, choose to argue the side you don't agree with! It might give you insight into the opinions of people who think differently than you.
- **Watch candidates for elected office debate.** It could be between the candidates for president, congress, or governor from your area. Or you could attend a debate among local candidates for mayor, town council, or student council. After watching the debate, discuss the arguments both sides made with a friend or family member and whether there's common ground. (You might want to look into the issues before you watch so you can understand the arguments.)
 - **Tip:** You can find almost any debate online check out this one from the last Democratic presidential debate:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCTY6MxJ4I> (Note: We have only listed the Democratic candidate debate and not the Republican debate because there was no republican debate for this election cycle. This in no way reflects the political beliefs of Girl Scouts as an organization)
- **Understand a famous debate in American history.** It might be one of the debates between the suffragists and elected officials in the early 1900s. or a debate between Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. Find out why the debate proved historic and who was considered the winner and why. What was the common ground in the opposing positions?
 - **Check out this video that reenacts Hamilton and Jefferson's debate:**
<https://youtu.be/f-lf7tU7IkE>
 - **More to explore:** Debate for fun! Join the debate team or mock-trial team at school and share what you learn with your Girl Scout group.

Debate topic ideas:

- The United States should lower the voting age.
- Junk food should be banned in schools.
- School should be year-round.
- Peer pressure can be more beneficial than harmful.
- Schools should not use standardized testing.

Finding Common Ground

- Television is a bad influence.
- Schools should ban animal dissection.
- School attendance should be voluntary.

What other topics are you interested in debating?

Step 4: Understand a compromise

Compromise is a settlement where both sides yield, or *concede*, some points to the other in order to find the common ground where their wishes intersect. Take a closer look at one of the following.

Choices—Do One:

- **A community compromise.** Ask a historian or an elected official to tell you about a compromise in your community. (For example, there may have been a compromise on your school's P.E. uniform requirement) Where did the two sides stand at the beginning? Where did they end up? How did they arrive at that decision? How does this compromise impact life where you live?
 - **Tip:** if you don't know who the elected officials are in your area check out this website to find them: <https://www.in.gov/sos/elections/2681.htm>
- **A family or friendship compromise.** Think of a situation in which you and a family member or friend had to compromise to be able to work or live together. Use that situation or interview an older family member about a compromise that helped shape your family. If you can imagine a more positive outcome, open up the discussion, and try finding common ground.
 - **Check out this video that talks more about how you can learn to compromise:** <https://youtu.be/JN9jPCPFWT0>
- **A state or national compromise.** Speak with a history teacher, elected official, or another expert with knowledge of the government about a compromise in your state or federal government. Where did the two sides stand at the beginning? Where did they end up? How does this compromise affect your life?
 - **Tip:** To read about an example of a compromise, read this article about Indiana governments compromise with the Indiana Broadcaster Association- <https://www.indianabroadcasters.org/iba-news/indiana-broadcasters-applaud-compromise-on-government-video-bill/>

“People talk about the middle of the road as though it were unacceptable. Actually, all human problems, excepting morals, come into the gray areas. Things are not all black and white. There have to be compromises. The middle of the road is all of the usable surface. The extremes, right and left, are in the gutters.” – Dwight D. Eisenhower, former U.S president.

Step 5: Find common ground through mediation

Mediators are third parties who help people or groups in a dispute find common ground. At some schools, peers are trained to be conflict mediators for one another. Civil mediators within the U.S. court system help both sides come to an agreement without going to trial. As the final step, try being the citizen who helps others come to an agreement.

Finding Common Ground

Choices- Do One:

- **Mediate a cookie conflict.** Gather two people to help you complete this activity. Each person will have a side in the conflict. Here's the conflict: There are nine cookies in a variety of flavors and differing numbers of each one- and they need to be divided fairly between two people. Serve as the mediator to find a solution both sides can live with. (Before the mediation begins, give each person time to decide how they think the cookies should be divided and to come up with three reasons they believe their solution to be fair.)
 - **Follow the six steps of a formal mediation:**
 - Give your opening remarks: Review the conflict and set ground rules.
 - State the problem: Let both people state their positions.
 - Gather information: Ask open-ended questions (those without yes or no answers) to get the heart of each person's position.
 - Summarize: Summarize the conflict, based on what you've heard.
 - Brainstorm solutions: Brainstorm possible solutions.
 - Reach an agreement: Offer ideas about where you think there is common ground. If the two sides don't agree, start with step 4, and keep going until you reach an agreement.
 - Together, enjoy a yummy snack and celebrate a successful mediation!
- **Mediate with a pro.** Invite a civil mediator or a student or professor in law or conflict resolution to talk with you. Ask them to share real-life examples of civil or international mediation and to lead you in an exercise to try out some mediation skills of your own.
 - **Check out this informational video on conflict resolution to give you more of an idea:** <https://youtu.be/KY5TWVz5ZDU>
- **Suggest solutions for a current international conflict.** What are the positions on both sides? Pretend they've come to you to help them negotiate a peace *treaty*. On your own or with friends or family, decide what you think is the common ground, and develop a one-page proposal for a "treaty". Share it with Girl Scouts of Central Indiana by emailing a copy of your treaty to Jory Sejdiu at jsejdiu@girlscoutsindiana.org
 - **Use this website to help you understand how to write a treaty:** <https://classroom.synonym.com/how-to-write-a-peace-agreement-12084200.html>
 - **Check out this video to understand more about what a treaty is:** <https://study.com/academy/lesson/treaties-and-the-law-definition-examples.html>

Careers to Explore:

- Judge
- Elected official
- Civil mediator
- Chief executive officer
- Ambassador
- School principal
- Teacher
- Foreign service officer

Finding Common Ground

- Elementary school teacher
- School psychologist
- Social worker
- Lawyer
- Psychiatrist
- Counselor

Words to Know:

- **Treaty:** A formal agreement between two or more states.
- **Concede:** To admit that something is true or valid after first denying or resisting it.
- **Persuade:** To cause someone to do something through reasoning or argument.
- **Unanimous:** Two or more people fully in agreement.
- **Consensus:** A general agreement.
- **Microaggression:** A statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a *marginalized* group such as a racial or ethnic minority.
 - **Check out this video that explains more about microaggressions and gives examples:** <https://youtu.be/8RfwnibEd3A>
- **Marginalized:** A person, group, or concept treated as insignificant or less than.
- **Biases:** Prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.
- **Prejudices:** Preconceived opinion that is not based on reason.

10 qualities of effective mediators:

Here are a few qualities of effective mediators. Do you see any of your skills or skills you'd like to develop? If so, see if your school has a peer-mentor program you might take part in.

1. Sensitive to each party's strongly held values
2. Aware of cultural, economic, social, and gender differences
3. Listen carefully and well
4. Communicate clearly
5. Come up with helpful questions
6. Maintain and demonstrate neutrality toward all parties
7. Control their own *biases*, *prejudices*, and emotions
8. Command the respect of all parties involved
9. Creative in imaging solutions
10. Patient and determined

Peace Studies:

People who work in fields relating to peace studies aim to prevent and solve conflicts through peaceful means. They try to promote peace and human welfare across the world. Many colleges and universities offer degrees in peace studies. After graduating with a degree in this

Finding Common Ground

field, people often start careers in law, education, journalism, or politics. They may travel to war-torn areas to help restore peace or work with smaller conflicts as mediators.

Now that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:

- Compromising with siblings without involving my parents
- Using common-ground strategies to make decisions in my Cadette group
- Finding common ground with girls in other groups at school.