Peace Literacy Aggression Lesson: Day 1
(an abridged version of Peace Literacy Lesson Plan 1)

Prepared by:

Paul K. Chappell
Peace Leadership Director, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation

Sharyn Clough
Peace Literacy Curriculum Coordinator, Co-Director Phronesis Lab, Oregon State University

When you teach this in your own classes, maybe have music playing to signal the themes of the class – Marvin Gaye “Mercy Me,” never gets old.

Learning Outcomes for 90 min lesson

- Exercise Empathy to Recognize Distress in Ourselves
- Identify the Different Kinds of Aggression
- Recognize Aggression as a Distress Response
- Understand the Universal Human Phobia
- Listen with Empathy
- Exercise Empathy to Recognize Distress in Others

Introduce Peace Literacy

Distribute Worksheet

10 mins

- Most of us think about peace as an abstract goal that would be nice to have, but it’s unclear how to get there.
- What if we instead thought about peace as a set of skills that require training?
- Write this on the board as you say it:
  • We can think of training as two things: 1. Learning 2. Practice.

If we want to get better at something, this requires training, in the form of learning and practice.

- Ask students: Think of other things in life that require learning and practice to do well.
- Possible answers: math, reading, martial arts, drawing, singing, driving, playing a sport or instrument, being good at a video game, etc.
  • Practically everything requires learning and practice to do well!
  • Many athletes, soldiers, and people who do meditation even improve how they breathe through learning and practice.
- Peace, just like everything else, requires training, in the form of learning and practice.
- But rarely do people think of peace this way.
• Many leaders in peace movements over the years, especially Gandhi and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., recognized the importance of training to build peace skills so that we can effectively deal with struggle and conflict.

• Has anyone learned about the Nashville and Birmingham Lunch Counters Campaign during the Civil Rights movement?
  • What kind of training did they do to prepare?

• Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. in turn inspired many others including Paul K. Chappell, a West Point graduate and veteran of the Iraq war.

• Show video of Chappell talking about our need for what he calls peace literacy

• You can find the video at the link, below, with English closed-captioning available, or as a file on your shared Google drive
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnYcpjzqKHz&feature=youtu.beclip from

• Watch 1min 22 secs - stop the video after “what if people were as well-trained in waging peace as soldiers are in waging war”

• After watching the film clip of Chappell, say to students: Answer this question on your worksheet:
  • According to Chappell, why should we not be surprised at the level of violence in the world?
  • Any questions?

• We’re going to introduce some peace skills that you can practice and use right here in class, at home with your families, and with your friends.

• And we are going to start by talking about aggression!

• The main goal for today is to give you some tools that will help you think about aggression in a new way, and to give you some peace skills you can practice to give you options other than aggression when dealing with struggle and conflict.

5 mins

Empathy Exercise 1 from worksheet:

• Ask students: What is empathy?

• This next exercise involves having empathy for yourself, being able to connect with and understand yourself so that you are not a stranger to yourself. This requires that you listen to yourself—it’s a kind of mindfulness—but we also need to add self-compassion.

• On your worksheet, write down 1 or 2 things that are nagging at you in the background, lingering worries or concerns that have nothing directly to do with this class but might affect your learning today (you won’t be asked to share any of this).

• Bringing these issues to conscious attention is called mindfulness.

• Read over the concerns you’ve listed—don’t make a judgment about whether the concerns are good or bad, reasonable or unreasonable, they are human concerns.
This exercise won’t get rid of those intrusive thoughts, but by noticing them they are less likely to have an effect—they won’t surprise you.

And when these concerns come back, which they might, perhaps several times during this class, you can recognize them now as old friends: “oh look, here is some anxiety again.”

This recognition is self-compassion, which means having empathy for yourself.

It helps you to be kind to yourself.

It is not easy being human – cut yourself some slack!

If this seems difficult, remember that you can gradually get better at this, just like you can gradually get better at anything through learning and practice.

Practice doing this on your own at the start of each class, and remember that everyone in the class is having their own struggles!

5 mins
Introduce the concept of “Aggression as a Distress Response”

Aggression is like the heat emitted from a fire.

The fire is a metaphor for the many forms of pain or discomfort that can cause aggression.

People don’t become aggressive because they feel good.

The fire can symbolize pain or discomfort that is psychological or physical.

We want to focus more on the psychological forms of pain and discomfort because it takes more practice to recognize the psychological forms.

Have the students fill in the worksheet answering the following 2 questions. Tell them sharing their answers will be optional:

• The metaphorical fires (forms of pain or discomfort) that can cause me or other people to feel the heat of aggression include (list emotions or feelings):

• Some of the ways that I have expressed aggression, or seen other people express aggression, include (list actions):

10 mins

Ask students: If you’re ok sharing what you wrote, tell us, what forms of pain or discomfort can lead you or other people to behave aggressively?

On the far left side of the board, write a list from their answers.

When we are feeling aggressive, it is because we are feeling some kind of pain or discomfort.

In other words, because we are dealing with some kind of distress.
If we train our minds to see aggression as a distress response, it can drastically improve how we interact not only with others, but also with ourselves.

Side Note:

- Students sometimes mistake passion for aggression.
- If students give examples of passion (e.g., in sporting contexts or inspirational passionate speeches where voices get loud) tell them we’ll distinguish these when we get to the next step (the Anatomy of Aggression).
- If a passionate response doesn’t fit under the headings from the Anatomy then we should not consider it aggression.

In the middle of the board, draw the three circles from the Anatomy of Aggression on p. 8 (don’t label them with headings yet).

Start writing down their answers to the prompt “Some of the ways that I have expressed aggression, or seen other people express aggression, include (list actions).”

As you write their answers, place the answers in one of the three categories of the Anatomy of Aggression (noting that some overlap).

Add the headings in only after you have a few examples from each.

Tell students: There are three forms of aggression (have them start to fill in worksheets on p. 3).

1. The first is Hostile Aggression, which means intent to harm.
   - There are two kinds of Hostile Aggression:
     - The first kind of Hostile Aggression is physical aggression which can be directed in three ways: at others, at objects (Ask students if they have ever hit a physical object such as a wall or wanted to throw their phone), and at yourself (Ask for examples of physical aggression towards ourselves—some kinds of alcohol and drug addiction, cutting, hitting yourself, suicide).
     - The second kind of Hostile Aggression is social aggression. (ask for further examples).
     - To lead into the discussion of the universal human phobia, Ask students: Is it possible for social aggression to feel worse than physical aggression?
     - Why is this?
10 mins
Talk about the Universal Human Phobia
- **Ask students**: What is a phobia? *Allow for responses.*
- Practically everyone has a phobia—it’s nothing to be ashamed of.
- **Ask students**: What are some examples of phobias?
- There is one phobia that is shared by ninety-eight percent of humans.
- Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman calls this the **Universal Human Phobia**.
- It is the most common phobia of all.
- **Ask students**: What is the phobia shared by ninety-eight percent of people? Can you guess what it is?
- **Answer**: Ninety-eight percent of humans have a phobia of human aggression directed at them.

**Side Note**
- If students respond by saying “public speaking,” they are partially correct, because the universal human phobia is the underlying fear that causes people to be afraid of public speaking.
- If students respond by saying being humiliated, betrayed, or anything to do with human beings hurting us, they are also partially correct.
- The universal human phobia encompasses all forms of malicious human harm that seem to directly target us, which can include humiliation and betrayal.

- **Have students write the definition of the Universal Human Phobia on their worksheets.**

*Read aloud and direct students to read along to themselves* the excerpt on pg. 4 of their worksheets from *The Cosmic Ocean* which makes clear how our fear of human aggression directed at us can be even greater than our fear of death.

“Every year in America hundreds of thousands die from the effects of smoking, but every day millions of people smoke without worrying. Every year in America tens of thousands die in car accidents, but every day millions of people drive casually to work. However, a few murders by a serial killer can cause a city to go on alert, striking terror in many of its citizens. The September 11 attacks, even though they killed far fewer people than car accidents and smoking related deaths annually, created so much fear that our country has never been the same since.

In an article in The Atlantic titled “Americans Are as Likely to Be Killed by Their Own Furniture as by Terrorism,” Micah Zenko wrote: “Of the 13,288 people killed by terrorist attacks [around the world] last year [2011], seventeen were private U.S. citizens, or .001 percent ... The number of U.S. citizens who died in terrorist attacks increased by two between
2010 and 2011; overall, a comparable number of Americans are crushed to death by their televisions or furniture each year. This is not to diminish the real—albeit shrinking—threat of terrorism, or to minimize the loss and suffering of the 13,000 killed and over 45,000 injured around the world. For Americans, however, it should emphasize that an irrational fear of terrorism is both unwarranted and a poor basis for public policy decisions.”

The death of every person killed by terrorism is tragic, yet if fifteen thousand Americans were killed by terrorism every year (a thousand times the fifteen Americans killed in 2010), this would still be less than half the number of Americans killed in car accidents annually (usually between thirty and forty thousand).” From The Cosmic Ocean, pp. 212-213.

- **Ask students:** If car accidents and smoking are statistically more likely to kill us, why do people tend to be so much more afraid of terrorism, mass shooters, and violent home invasion than they are of car accidents and smoking?
- **Answer:** Because terrorism, mass shootings are acts of human aggression.

**Side Note:**
- If students say the reason we are more afraid of terrorism than car accidents is because we do not have control when terrorism or other incidents of human violence are concerned, but we do have control when driving is concerned, remind them of the lack of control we have when riding in a taxi or sleeping while someone else is driving (discussed further on pp. 213-214 of The Cosmic Ocean).
- Also, natural disasters are an example where we lack control, but most of us still fear these events less than we fear human aggression directed at us (the universal human phobia).

To better understand the universal human phobia, I am going to give you two scenarios, and you tell me which scenario is more traumatizing.
- In the first scenario you are riding your bike, you fall off your bike, and you break your leg.
- In the second scenario you are riding your bike, a group of people grab you, hold you down, and break your leg with a baseball bat.
- Which scenario is more traumatizing? **Allow for responses.**

- **Ask students:** If the physical injury—a broken leg—is the same in both scenarios, then why is it more traumatizing if people intentionally break our leg?

**Side Note:**
- If students say that it is more traumatizing to have our leg broken by attackers because the attackers can come back, remind them that accidents can also reoccur.
- We could experience an accident at almost any moment of any day, but accidents do not cause as much fear in most people as malicious human attacks do.

- **Answer:** Because of the universal human phobia.
We are so vulnerable to human-induced trauma that a human being doesn’t even have to physically touch us to traumatize us.

A human being can traumatize us by betraying us, humiliating us, verbally abusing us, spreading malicious gossip about us, shunning us, etc.

This is one of the reasons why racial slurs can be so traumatizing.

15 mins

Return to the Three forms of Aggression:

2. The second form of Aggression is Passive Aggression, which means indirectly showing contempt.

- Contempt can be defined as feelings of disrespect.
- We can show this contempt consciously or unconsciously.
- Ask students: Can you think of other examples of passive aggression?
- Make sure that examples such as eye-rolling, sighing, and sarcasm have been listed.
- These are examples of aggression, and remember that when people are aggressive they are in distress.

3. There is a third kind of aggression, that most of us didn’t learn about in school (you are unlikely to get any examples of this spontaneously from students).

- Imagine there is a pack of wolves, a grizzly bear, and a dead deer.
- Both the pack of wolves and the grizzly bear want to eat the dead deer.
- Ask students: What usually happens?
- Answer: In these situations, animals typically do not fight, they posture.
- When animals in nature posture, they make noise and try to appear larger.

- What does a cat do? Allow for responses.
  - Can anyone do an impression of a cat posturing?
  - Cats not only posture by making noise, but they also posture by appearing larger when they arch their back, or when the hair on their back stands up.

- What does a rattlesnake do? Allow for responses.
  - Rattlesnakes not only posture by shaking their tails to make a rattling sound, but they also coil their bodies, which serves the dual purpose of allowing them to appear larger and giving them the option to strike if they need to.

- What does a cobra do? Allow for responses.
  - Cobras not only make noise by hissing, but they also lift their head and spread their hood to look larger.

- What does a gorilla do? Allow for responses.
  - Gorillas posture by beating their chest, showing their teeth, standing on their back legs, or charging.
- **Ask students:** Why do animals in nature posture? Unless they are hunting, why do they prefer to posture rather than fight?
- **Answer:** There are no hospitals or emergency rooms in the wild!
- Even if you win a fight, you might break your leg, break your jaw, or get an infection from an injury and die.
- Violence in nature is very dangerous, so animals prefer to avoid violence if they can.
- **Watch three short videos from animals posturing in the wild (available on your shared Google Drive or at these links)**
  - Mother Bear Posturing Against Hunting Wolves [https://youtu.be/A56wgWDAYmM](https://youtu.be/A56wgWDAYmM)
- The student **worksheet** when completed should look like this:

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- In our current education system, the vast majority of students never learn about warning aggression, which we can also call posturing. They only learn about the fight or flight response, even though posturing is the preferred method of self-defense for so many animals, and it is the most common form of aggression in nature.
- **Ask students:** Again, why is this the most common form of aggression in nature? Why do animals prefer posturing to violence?
- **Answer:** Because it is much safer for the animals involved.
- **This is also why we should never use the words violence and aggression interchangeably. We should never use them as synonyms.**
Most aggression in animals is warning aggression/posturing which is meant to **prevent** and **avoid** violence, so although aggression can be violent in the form of hostile aggression, most aggression is warning aggression, which is not violent.

Now what happens if you ignore the warning? **Allow for responses.**

If you ignore the warning, **then** the animal has the fight or flight response.

So when a rattlesnake shakes its tail, it is a good idea to pay attention to the warning and walk away.

If you ignore the warning, the rattlesnake might bite you.

*Show them the next video, available at this link, or on your shared google drive*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxHqdUUrU0&feature=youtu.be

In this video two bears posture with each other, trying to warn each other.

They each ignore multiple warnings from the other.

They not only growl **a lot** and stand up, but they push each other multiple times.

In this video, also notice **how** these bears fight each other.

When bears and many other predators hunt, they often bite the neck and stomach of their prey in order to kill.

When these bears end up fighting after a lot of posturing, notice that they don’t bite each other’s necks and stomachs, because they are not trying to kill each other.

In some ways, this fight looks similar to a wrestling match between humans.

**Ask students:** Any questions?

**Ask students:** Do humans posture? **Allow for responses.**

**Ask students:** What are examples of humans posturing? **Allow for responses.**

There are many examples, such as ancient Greek soldiers wearing big helmets, like the crest on the Spartan helmet!

Also soldiers screaming when they go into battle, the Haka of the Māori people, posturing between men or women before they get into a fight (e.g. standing tall, puffing out their chests, yelling), the many forms of posturing between nations (e.g., developing and stockpiling nuclear weapons), the loud noise of a gun.

Lt. Colonel Dave Grossman writes about this in his book *On Combat*

In nature, whoever makes the biggest bark or the biggest roar is most likely to win the battle.

**Read aloud and direct students** to read along to themselves the excerpt on the bottom of pg. 4 of their worksheets from *The Cosmic Ocean*

This is one of the primary reasons why the early, clumsy, smoothbore, muzzleloading muskets replaced the longbow and the crossbow. The longbow and the crossbow had many times the rate of fire, more accuracy and far greater accurate range when compared to the early smoothbore muskets. Yet these superior military weapons were replaced, almost overnight (historically speaking) by vastly inferior muskets. While they
were inferior at killing, they were not inferior at psychologically stunning and daunting an opponent . . . If you are in a battle going doink, doink with a crossbow and the other guy is going Boom! Boom! with a musket, all things being equal, the doinker will lose every time.

- Grossman calls this the **Bigger Bang Theory** - The army that can make louder noise has an advantage on the battlefield.
- Have students **identify the kinds of aggression** displayed in the cartoons on p. 5 of their **worksheets**

**5 mins**

- Here is a video that shows an example of humans posturing. This video is from *South Park*.
  - Show Southpark clip (30 secs, mild profanity: “Punk-ass”)
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHnbC1N_G6w
- **Ask students:** What was the fire causing the heat of their warning aggression? **Allow for responses.**
- **Answer:** The fire was feelings of disrespect. As soon as the disrespect went away, the aggression went away.
- **Ask students:** Did it seem like the two men wanted to escalate their aggression to violence? **Allow for responses.**
- Just like animals, we often use warning aggression when we are afraid of violence.
- **Recognizing that warning aggression is caused by fear or some other kind of distress requires empathy.**
- When someone is coming at you aggressively posturing, it is hard to empathetically recognize their fear or other kind of distress.
- That’s why you have to **practice** the skills of recognizing your own and other’s aggression as a distress response.
- When we empathetically see the fire beneath the aggression of others, this allows us to have even **more** empathy for them.
- We might not know the specific fires they’re dealing with, but we can recognize that they’re in distress of some kind.
- When we see the fire beneath our own aggression, we can learn how to deal with the fire rather than just lashing out with aggression.
- We are going to take a five minute break; when we come back, we are going to watch a video from *Key and Peele*.

**5 mins**

Break
This next clip brilliantly shows many of the metaphorical fires (the distress, pain or discomfort) that can cause the heat of human aggression.

- Show Key and Peele video “School Bully” (link below)
- Side note: this is an important and instructive video for understanding the Fires of Aggression, however in the first 18 seconds Jordan Peele’s character utters the word “bitch” multiple times – to avoid the appearance of endorsing this usage you can mute the video until 19 seconds in. He also utters the word “shit” but it is bleeped in the video. Finally, he uses the slur “queer” which is not bleeped – you might want to remind students that Jordan Peele’s character is in distress and that we want to learn how to handle the kinds of conflicts depicted in the video rather than pretend they don’t happen) http://www.cc.com/video-clips/kisry6/key-and-peele-school-bully
- Tell students: Focus on Jordan Peele’s character, and his dad, as they are the ones behaving aggressively.
- Fill out these questions on p. 6 of you worksheet:
  - What were some of the fires causing the heat of Jordan Peele’s character’s aggression?
  - What were some of the fires causing the heat of his father’s aggression?
- Ask students to read their answers out loud. Point to those fires if they are already listed, or add them if they are not listed.
- Recognizing aggression as a distress response requires empathy.
- Recognizing aggression as a distress response is a skill that expands your options when you’re responding to your own aggression or someone else’s aggression.
- Aggression has its place. If you are surrounded by wolves, it can be best to use warning aggression or posturing.
- But if you are having a conflict in your relationship or community, or even with a stranger, peace skills offer us more effective options in the vast majority of situations.
- Recognizing aggression in yourself or others as a distress response, forces you to pause, even for a few seconds, which allows you to evaluate your next step more carefully.
- We should only use aggression, of any kind, as a last resort.
- Again, recognizing aggression as a distress response is a skill and skills require learning and practice.

Ask: Any Questions?

Exercise for Listening with Empathy

Divide the room along its longest axis and hang two signs one at either end: Agree, Disagree
- Pick a prompt ahead of time that is relevant to the students and for which you can think of good arguments in certain contexts for agreeing and disagreeing
Tell them to stand and tuck away their bags

Read out the prompt

(if there is time, have them write out their response to the prompt

if they aren’t sure of their view, or if their view requires more complexity than is allowed by simply agreeing or disagreeing, reassure them that they will have a chance to explain the nuances of their own views during the exercise and that the main point is to exchange viewpoints with someone else.

Tell them not to answer their views out loud, but to move to the side of the room that fits with their view.

Have them form a continuum stretching from the Agree to Disagree positions.

Have them lock elbows, and double back until everyone is facing someone from the other end of the continuum (there will be some in the middle who are noncommittal which is not a problem).

Tell them this is an exercise in empathetic listening.

Have them shake hands and introduce each other.

Ask students how they will communicate empathy and respect nonverbally – usually nodding and making eye contact (there might be cultural differences here).

Choose which side of the room will speak first about their view.

Tell them to breathe deeply. Feel their feet contact the ground. Look at their partner.

The first partner speaks for ONE MINUTE, the other partner DOES NOT SPEAK, BUT LISTENS CAREFULLY.

Then for ONE MINUTE the listening partner repeats what they heard, without saying whether they agree or disagree, using terms the speaking partner would recognize as their own.

Allow 30 seconds for clarification between the partners.

Now switch.

5 mins

Debrief

This was a simple exercise in listening with empathy.

To get better at it we’d need to make it harder each time.

Ask students: how might we make it harder?

Possible answers: pick more personal topics, listen for longer than 1 min., list 2 points of agreement).

5 mins

Lesson Summary:

Have students turn to last page of their worksheet

Have students turn to last page of their worksheet
Draw Venn Diagram (as below right) Healthier Ways to Deal with Pain/Discomfort:

- All aggression is caused by pain/discomfort, but not all pain/discomfort has to lead to aggression!
- We can use Peace Literacy which gives us a larger range of options/skills.
- We can exercise our empathy so we can recognize when we or others are in distress.
  - **In others:** When we empathetically see the fire beneath the aggression of others, this allows us to have even more empathy for them which can expand our options for responding effectively.
  - We might not know the specific fires they’re dealing with, but we can recognize that they’re in distress of some kind.
  - **In ourselves:** When we see the fire beneath our own aggression, we can learn how to deal with the fire rather than just lashing out with aggression.
- The skill of recognizing aggression as a distress response forces you to pause, even for a few seconds, which can be the time you need to consider options.
- Our next lesson will focus on some of these options.

5 mins

Empathy Exercise 2 (empathy for others—it’s on the last page of the student worksheet)
*(if there’s no time, add it at the end of the day as a follow-up exercise)*

- You won’t share this with anyone. Think about someone you know who is struggling (don’t write their name), and list 1 or 2 kinds of distress (emotions) they might feeling.

Follow-up resources/activities to keep the momentum with students

- **The Aggression Journal:** Have students keep a journal where they note the times they have felt aggression in themselves; and ask them to see if after this lesson they can reach deeper to identify the underlying fires (pain, discomfort) that are causing their aggression (fear? embarrassment?).
- **Handout rubric (below)** that they can use to guide their observations.
- **If there wasn’t time** for the empathy for others exercise (#2) at the end of the worksheet, highlight that now
- Also, **check out Jimmy Kimmel on passive aggressive texting:**
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07TInrpKG6o
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Level I Competency</th>
<th>Level II Competency</th>
<th>Level III Competency</th>
<th>Level IV Competency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual is developing self-awareness of distress when acting aggressively or thinking aggressive thoughts.</td>
<td>Can recognize feelings of distress underlying aggressive thoughts and actions after conflict/incident has occurred. <strong>Depth/consistency:</strong> You might have deep competency at this level but not at other levels, and not all the time.</td>
<td>Can recognize feelings of distress during the conflict/incident and is able to <em>attempt</em> to stop or minimize the behavior during the conflict/incident. <strong>Depth/consistency:</strong> You might have deep competency at this level but not at other levels, and not all the time.</td>
<td>Can recognize feelings of distress before aggression or aggressive thoughts. Can redirect these thoughts or actions and keep them from occurring. <strong>Depth/consistency:</strong> You might have deep competency at this level but not at other levels, and not all the time.</td>
<td>Can recognize that this skill is context dependent – that is we can be skilled at this in some contexts but not others. Can exercise self-compassion when skill levels fluctuate. <strong>Depth/consistency:</strong> You might have deep competency at this level but not at other levels, and not all the time.</td>
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Teacher self-check: Are you modeling this for your students and colleagues? 😊