

"That's Not Fair!"

Social-Emotional Learning Objective: Fairness

Children often equate "fair" with "equal," but as this lesson shows the two concepts don't always mean the same thing.



Why It Matters

We live in an age where cries of "That's not fair!" are all around us, from children and adults alike. For this reason, it's imperative to teach kids about fairness, particularly focusing on the idea that fairness doesn't always mean everyone gets the same thing. Understanding what fairness looks like in different situations is a life skill everyone — including children — needs in our complex world.

- Children who understand fairness develop more compassion for others and an appreciation for each person's uniqueness.
- Learning about fairness helps children become more able to resolve frustrations they may have over issues of fairness.
- A child who values fairness is more likely to be a team player who does his or her share of the work.

- Children who are taught about fairness learn to evaluate situations critically and respond appropriately.
- Developing a mindset of fairness helps children become more open-minded.
- Children who seek to be fair are less likely to judge others without knowing the whole situation. They are also more likely to treat others with honesty and respect.
- A classroom where fairness is taught provides children with a safer, more positive place to learn.

Bottom line: Fairness is a tough issue for children and adults. Taking the time to teach students about the nuances of fairness is critical to helping them become caring, responsible adults.

Goal for the lesson: Demonstrate for students that fairness is a complex topic that requires careful reflection.

Grade levels: Kindergarten–Grade 5

Suggested time needed: 55 minutes

Materials: \$15 in play money (either 15 \$1 bills or three \$5 bills), three same-size adhesive bandages, class supply of the "How Am I Doing With Fairness?" form, student journals

Materials for each small group: copies of the "Fair or Unfair?" handout and the "Being Fair Means You..." handout, scissors, tape

Bell-Ringer Activity

1. Write this sentence on the board: "That's not fair!" Draw a speech bubble around the sentence.
2. Ask each student to explain in his or her journal what the sentence means and why someone might say it.
3. Provide time for students to share their answers. Discuss how, in your years of working with children, the sentence "That's not fair!" or "No fair!" is one you've heard again and again for lots of different reasons. (No doubt your students will admit they've said it!)

Whole-Group and Small-Group Activity

1. Ask three students to come to the front of the room. Announce that you are going to pretend that these students are your own children who have asked if they can go rollerskating on Saturday. You have decided to say yes.
2. Announce that tickets are \$5 each, and then count out \$5 of play money to each student. Ask, "Was I fair to my children?" Have students explain why or why not.
3. Ask three other students to come to the front of the room. Tell the class that these students have each been injured: Student 1 has cut his finger, Student 2 has broken her arm, and Student 3 has a concussion.
4. Let the students know that you are going to treat those injuries. Give each of the three students a same-sized bandage, and then say, "There, that will take care of the injury! All better!" Ask the rest of the class, "Was I fair to these three kids?" Guide students to recognize that giving

each the same bandage was equal but not fair since the three injuries varied in severity. Point out that being fair does not always mean that people get the same thing (as they did in your rollerskating scenario). Sometimes the fair thing to do is to consider the needs of the people involved in the situation and then give each person what he or she needs.

5. Divide the class into small groups. Give each group a copy of the "Fair or Unfair?" handout and a pair of scissors. Instruct the groups to cut out the strips, place the two heading cards on a table, and arrange each remaining strip under the "Fair" or "Unfair" label. Give groups five minutes to sort the strips. **For younger students**, complete the activity as a class using only three or four of the strips.
6. Have each group list on the board the strips it sorted under the "Fair" heading card. Discuss any differences between the groups' lists, asking students to give reasons for their decisions.

Small-Group Activity

1. Divide students into small groups. Give each group a copy of the "Being Fair Means You..." worksheet and a pair of scissors.
2. Explain to students that the strips list the traits of a fair person. Direct the groups to cut out the strips and arrange them in order from most important to least important. When all group members are happy with the arrangement, have one student tape the strips to the board in a column with the most important trait at the top.

3. As a class, compare the groups' rankings. Ask groups to share the reasons for their top rankings. End the activity by pointing out that all of the traits are essential to being fair, but we individually value some aspects of fairness over others. Those subjective decisions are part of what makes fairness a difficult concept.

Exit Activity: Ask each student to write in his or her journal about a situation at school or home that he or she thinks is unfair. Have the student suggest a fair way to resolve the issue. Or, as an alternative, challenge the student to create a comic strip showing the situation and possible resolutions.

Take-Home Task: Give each student a copy of the "How Am I Doing With Fairness?" form. Have the student fill out the form and share it with a family member. Then have him or her bring it back to school the next day. Provide time for small groups to discuss their evaluations and suggestions for improvement. **For younger students,** write one of the fairness traits at the top of a piece of paper. Make a copy for each child. Read the trait to the student; then have him or her draw a picture to illustrate the trait.

Fairness on the Field

Playing team games on the playground or in the school gym can be a great time to discuss fairness issues. Before starting the game, talk about the rules and how they do (or don't) make the game fair for everyone who is playing. If there are disputes during the game, encourage students to look at all sides of the issue and decide together on a fair way to proceed. Then get back to the game!



Teacher Notes

Fair or Unfair?

Cut out the strips.

Place the heading cards on a table.

Read each situation and place it under the appropriate heading.



Fair

Unfair

- | | |
|--|--|
| ①
You have to pay a fee for a late library book. The librarian just let your friend turn in his late book without charging him a fee. | ②
Your older sister gets to stay up one hour later than you do on school nights. |
| ③
Some students get extra time to take the same test you have to take. | ④
A child has been out sick from school for several days. The teacher tells her that she does not have to make up all of the homework assignments. |
| ⑤
Two of your team's players are 10 minutes late for practice. The coach makes the entire team stay at practice for an extra hour. | ⑥
Only older students are allowed to play on the school's football team. |
| ⑦
Your parents won't let you sign up for soccer because your older sister was badly injured playing soccer last year. | ⑧
The kindergarten students are allowed to talk in the school hallways. All other grades are not. |
| ⑨
Your family is moving. Your parents are letting your older sister get first choice of her new bedroom. | ⑩
You just let your friend cut in line at the water fountain. |
| ⑪
Your club leader announces that everyone must be at the meeting by 5:30 p.m. She walks into the meeting the next week at 6 p.m. | ⑫
Joey wants to be on the baseball team, but the coach says he has to try out. The coach tells Jorge he doesn't need to try out since he was on the team last year. |

Being Fair Means You...

...treat people with respect and honesty.

...take turns and share.

...give everyone an equal opportunity to succeed.

...cooperate with one another.

...listen to others.

...don't judge people without knowing the whole

...don't take advantage of others.

...make sure others are not treated badly.

...appreciate everyone's unique traits and abilities.

Name _____ Thinking about fairness

Date _____



How Am I Doing With Fairness?

Fill in the box to show how often you demonstrate each trait of fairness.

Use the key to help you.

KEY

- + Often
- 4 Sometimes
- Rarely or never

- ☐ I treat people with respect and honesty.
- ☐ I take turns and share.
- ☐ I cooperate with other people.
- ☐ I listen to others.
- ☐ I don't judge people without knowing the whole situation.
- ☐ I don't take advantage of others.
- ☐ I make sure others are treated the way I'd like to be treated.
- ☐ I appreciate others' unique traits and abilities.

What are two things you can do to become a more fair person?

- _____

- _____
