

Metaphors for the Future

(adapted from the lesson "Inventing the Future" by CPAWS Education, Alberta, Canada)

OVERVIEW

Students use metaphors describing different degrees of control we have over our future to explore how worldviews and mental models influence and shape our actions.

INQUIRY/CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

- How do perception and worldview influence and shape our actions?
- How can we create the future that we want?

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Discuss and write about a pressing issue of the future from the perspective of a specific worldview
- Determine what metaphor best describes the student's view of the future
- Evaluate how different perspectives on our level of control over the future influence behavior and actions

TIME REQUIRED: 1 hour

KEY ISSUES/CONCEPTS

- **Metaphor**
- **Worldview**
- **Envisioning**

SUBJECT AREAS

- **Social Studies**
(Geography, Civics/Government, Global Studies, Contemporary World Problems)
- **Science** (Environmental)
- **Language Arts**

NATIONAL STANDARDS CONSISTENCY

- **NCSS: 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 10**
- **NSES: F, G**

GRADE LEVEL: 7–12

FTF Related Reading

- Intermediate: Chapter 9 from *Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions*
- Advanced: Unit 7 from *It's All Connected*

Materials/Preparation

- Handout: *Metaphors for the Future*
- The 4 metaphors of the future presented in this activity range from a perspective of pre-determinism to total self-determination. After analyzing a few critical issues from the perspective of 1 of these views of the future, students will have a chance to choose or create a metaphor that they feel best represents their own view of the future. One purpose of the activity is to allow students a chance to "see" the world through the eyes of someone else. Another purpose is to offer students a way

to identify and form their own views of the future. Finally, students are encouraged to explore how different worldviews influence our actions and affect outcomes.

Activity

Introduction

1. Ask students to brainstorm some issues/problems/concerns that they feel humanity must address in the next 20 to 50 years (for example, the growing gap between the rich and poor, AIDS, or environmental degradation).
2. Tell students they are going to explore the future of some of these issues using several metaphors. You may need to define metaphor (i.e. a figure of speech in which one thing is described as if it were another, as in "Life is just a bowl of cherries.").

Metaphors for the Future

Steps

1. Arrange the class into at least 4 groups with no more than 5 students per group.
2. Assign each group 1 of the metaphors for the future from the handout, *Metaphors for the Future*. Do not have students share their view with the other groups.
3. In their groups, have the students read their metaphor together and then discuss and write a summary of how they would address 2 or 3 of the issues from the brainstorm list created in Step 1, as if they were a person who held the belief of their assigned metaphor. Have them discuss the positive and negative aspects of holding this view of the future. For example, the group with the metaphor that says “the future is like a great roller coaster on a moonless night” might respond to the issue of AIDS by saying that there is nothing they can do about it and therefore they will



choose to ignore this issue. A positive aspect of this view could be that they might not worry as much about this issue. The negative aspect of this view might be that the problem will persist and may eventually impact their lives even if they are not affected directly.

4. Have groups report to the class what their metaphor of the future is and describe their response to the issues.
5. After all of the metaphors and responses to the issues have been presented, have students choose which metaphor most closely represents their own view of the future and/or have students create a metaphor that describes their view of the future.
6. Have students share their chosen or newly created metaphor with a partner, and explain why they chose it.
7. Conclude with the following reflection questions.

Metaphors for the Future

Assessment

Reflection Questions

For Intermediate and Advanced Students

- Which metaphor was most popular? Which was least popular? Do you think this would hold true for most people? Which metaphor do you believe is most widely held by people in your family, school, community, and nation?
- Do you believe that people's actions are influenced by their views of the world and the future? Explain why or why not.
- Explain how you might act differently if you perceive that you have control over your future.

For Advanced Students

- Explain the underlying values and attitudes that led to your choice. For example, how do beliefs and values about fate (pre-determination) and freedom (self-determination) affect our perceptions?
- Which metaphor do you think someone would choose if he or she was a villager in India, a single mother in sub-Saharan Africa, a Palestinian refugee, a Chicago banker, or a homeless child in Brazil? What effect might their view of the world have on the way our future turns out?
- What will you need to implement your own metaphor or view of the future? For example, if you chose a ship on the ocean, what tools and information would you need to navigate the water?

Writing Connection

- Have students research a specific culture focusing on that culture's "worldview". Have them present and compare their findings.

Art Connection

- Have students make a collage display depicting the worldview and values of their culture.

Action Projects

- Adopt a school or classroom of younger students and do the Metaphors for the Future activity with them. Compare the differences between younger students' impressions of the future and older students'. Visit your adopted school or classroom once every month to do activities that address different global issues.
- Visit www.facingthefuture.org and click on **Take Action** for more information and action opportunities on a variety of global and local issues.

Additional Resources

Books

- *Ishmael (1992) and My Ishmael (1998)*, Daniel Quinn, Bantam/Turner. Ishmael, a gorilla rescued from a traveling show who has learned to reason and communicate, uses these skills to educate himself in human history and culture. Ishmael lays out a theory of what has gone wrong with human civilization and how to correct it – a theory based on the tenet that humanity belongs to the planet rather than vice versa. In the sequel, *My Ishmael*, Quinn focuses on the "Leavers" and "Takers", his terms for the two basic, warring elements of human sensibility.

Lesson 38 Handout:

Metaphors for the Future

1. The Future is Like a Great Roller Coaster on a Moonless Night.

It exists, twisting ahead of us in the dark, but we can only see the track that is just ahead. We are locked in our seats, and nothing we may know or do will change the course that is laid out for us. In other words, the future is predetermined and there is nothing we can do about it.

2. The Future is Like a Huge Game of Dice.

It is entirely random and subject only to chance. For example, a woman misses a plane by a few seconds and avoids dying when the plane crashes. Since everything is chance, all we can do is play the game, pray to the gods of fortune, and enjoy what luck comes our way. In other words, the future is totally random and we do not know how or if our actions make a difference.

3. The Future is Like a Great Ship on the Ocean.

We can travel freely upon it and there are many possible routes and destinations. There will always be some outside forces, such as currents, storms, and reefs, to be dealt with, but we still have the choice to sail our ship where we want to go. In other words, we can choose whatever future we want if we are willing to work with a purpose and within the knowledge and constraints of outside forces.

4. The Future is Like a Blank Sheet of Paper.

It is there for us to fill in with our actions and decisions in the present. If we choose the future we want and spend our daily lives trying to make it happen, it will probably materialize. If we leave it to the powers-that-be to decide upon and plan the future, we will have a very different kind of future—one dominated by the powerful. In other words, we have control over our future if we choose to act on it.