

A Fair Society?

by Dr Sue Knight

Topic objectives

This topic invites students to:

- think about inequalities which are not the fault of those who suffer them;
- distinguish between inequalities which are caused deliberately, by acts of discrimination, and inequalities which are the result, not of any wrong doing, but simply of good or bad luck; and
- consider whether either or both kinds of inequality are wrong, and if so, what, if anything, we should do about them.

This topic aims to help students develop:

- An understanding that unjust discrimination involves denying opportunities to members of a group for no good reason, that is, on the basis of irrelevant personal characteristics.
- An understanding of some of the complexities involved in ensuring real equality of opportunity, and of the extent to which bad luck is a cause of inequalities.
- A considered view of whether society has a moral responsibility to do what it can to create real equality of opportunity.
- A considered view on whether society has a moral obligation to address inequalities that result from good and bad luck.

Background to the topic for teachers

Most of us are aware of inequality – on a global basis and also closer to home. The distribution of wealth and discrimination limiting access to opportunity for individuals and groups are just two examples. Consumer Finances reports that the top 3 percent of Americans now hold over double the wealth of America's poorest 90 percent of families inequality.org/wealth-inequality/ Accessed 6th January 2016. Some inequalities are deliberately imposed. Racial discrimination for example, keeps people of one race out of jobs and education which are open to people of another race. Most people would consider this unfair. As Thomas Nagel puts it, 'Fairness requires that opportunities be open to those who are qualified' (What does it all mean? Oxford University Press, 1987).

We cannot talk about discrimination without coming to grips with the notion of equality of opportunity. But when we look at it, we find it to be a bit slippery. For example, suppose a principal decides that her school should have a choir, and that any student who wants to do so can audition for it. However in order to be chosen for the choir, students have to sing in tune. Is this fair? Well, everyone has an equal opportunity to try, and if you let in those who can't sing in tune, the choir will sound awful. But on the other hand, some students go to singing lessons on the weekends, so they have an advantage- they have a head start.

But some inequalities are not imposed - they are simply the result of luck. Some children are born into comfortable circumstances, are well fed and have access to a good education. Others are born to poor families, go hungry or have no access to medical care or education. This is not the fault of the children. Is it unfair? And if it is, should governments do something about it?

These are the questions we're focusing on in this topic.

This topic follows a particular structure that is designed to guide students to thoughtfully consider what constitutes a fair society. The first lesson introduces a fictional society with two distinct classes. Four

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significant questions are introduced. The middle two lessons bring the idea of fairness in society closer to home, with real life questions that introduce the idea of discrimination. This provides the opportunity for students to consider some of the complexities involved in ensuring real equality of opportunity.

The final lesson returns to the fictional society, asking students to consider how the government could make the society fairer and whether a fair society is even possible. At this stage of the topic, after students have had the opportunity to think in a structured way about the notions of fairness and equal opportunity, we ask the four big questions again, and this time we are looking for more nuanced reasoning, incorporating empathising, formulating concepts of fairness and applying those concepts, looking at the whole picture, and making judgements about practicalities and strategies. Although the questions in lessons 1 and 4 are the same, it is likely that the students' responses will be significantly more developed by lesson 4.

There is an online lecture given by Michael Sandel of Harvard University on Justice. It provides an excellent background to the topic for teachers wishing to know more, and is recommended as background for teachers. The lecture (Lecture 8) can be accessed here:

<http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-08/#watch> (If you have trouble with this link, just copy and paste the address into your browser).

Topic Structure and Resources

Aim of lesson	Resources
<p>Lesson 1: Raising the big questions</p> <p>This lesson introduces The Outsiders and is designed to draw out students' initial thoughts and impressions on the four big questions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies of 'The Outsiders' script – one per student • Copies of the Outsiders question slips – one question for each group (of 3 or 4 students)
<p>Lesson 2: What does it mean to provide equality of opportunity?</p> <p>This lesson encourages students to think about discrimination and some of the complexities involved in ensuring real equality of opportunity. Students begin to think about whether offering everyone the same opportunities at school is fair when some people start out with a lot more advantages than others; and how the choices they make now could affect their opportunities in the future.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New school rules cards
<p>Lesson 3: What makes a law fair?</p> <p>This lesson encourages students to think about whether laws are fair if they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Discriminate (deliberately withhold opportunities)? – Allow opportunities to be determined by factors people they have no control over (by luck)? <p>After they have engaged in some logically structured thinking about key concepts,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Changed Laws' slips • 7 copies of 'The Ligurian Government Decides' script

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particularly the notions of fairness and equal opportunity, students have the opportunity to apply their previous reasoning on fairness to the initial two big questions posed in this topic.

Lesson 4: The government's responsibilities

This lesson presents optional approaches that the government could take and arguments for each one. Students are encouraged to consider which approaches would be the fairest, and then to apply their reasoning to the final two initial big questions.

- Copies of the play 'The Ligurian Government Decides' – one per student

References and further information

Lesson 1 The Outsiders	The Outsiders is a fictional TV series is loosely based on the series Outcasts (BBC, 2011)
Lesson 3 Discussion Plan: Fairness and equal opportunities	Question 3: 'In war, women as well as men can fight on the front lines, as long as they have the physical strength to do so.' - This ruling came into force in April 2011; previously, only men could engage in frontline combat. Question 4: 'When a female teacher gets married, she must resign her job, but this is not the case for a male teacher.' In some Australian states at least, this law was in force until 1972.

Lesson 1: Raising the big questions

For this lesson you will need

- Copies of 'The Outsiders' script – one for each role and additional copies for other student
- Copies of The Outsiders Question slips – one question for each group (of 3 or 4 students)

Role Play: The Outsiders

5 minutes

We are going to start our lesson today with a story, and I need 3 volunteers to read parts.

Select 3 students to read, and hand out copies of the story so that other students can read along.

Narrator: In the new TV series called The Outsiders, it is 2040 and nuclear war has left Earth uninhabitable. A group of pioneers sets out to colonize a new planet called Liguria. After a five-year journey, they begin the task of creating a new and better world.

Matt and Dewi have been watching the series and are discussing the latest episode, which shows a group of people, The Outsiders, who have been banished from the city and left without food or shelter to survive as best they can in the harsh conditions beyond the city walls. The Outsiders seem desperate, and Dewi is worried by their situation.

Dewi: Why do you think they're out there?

Matt: I don't know, they're probably criminals.

Dewi: But there were children out there – even a baby.

Matt: Well, maybe they've chosen to leave the city. Maybe they don't like the rules. We don't know how they worked out the laws – maybe people got to vote for the laws they wanted. And maybe the Outsiders didn't get the laws they voted for, so they left.

Dewi: But no one would choose to live like that? Who wants to go hungry? And what about the kids? They can't even go to school. And what if they get sick? There are no medicines and no hospitals. Whatever their parents have done, it's not the children's fault. They shouldn't have to live like that. It's just not fair! They should have the same opportunities as the city kids.

Matt: Well, maybe the government just doesn't have the money to look after everyone. They probably get their money from taxes, like our government does. People in the city pay taxes. And maybe they want the money spent on their own schools and hospitals, not on things for the people outside.

Dewi: It's funny - they went to Liguria to create a better world. But their world is really unfair. The Outsider children have a horrible life just because they've been born to Outsider parents and not to parents in the city.

Matt: Maybe that's just life. Some people are luckier than others. It's like that in our world too. I don't reckon there's anything we can do about it.

Initial views on the big questions

25 minutes

Thank you, readers.

Before we discuss this, is there anything in the story that anyone didn't understand, or anything you'd like to read again?

If students ask questions, encourage other students to help answer them.

Now I have some questions for you to think about, and we are going to do that in small groups. Each group will get one question to discuss, and you'll have about 4 minutes?

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Break class into groups of 3 or 4 students, and give each group one of the three questions. Check on the groups to make sure they're all on task. Then call the class back together.

Ensure you debrief the questions in order. Take responses and ask for reasons. Encourage discussion amongst students by asking procedural questions such as: 'Does anyone agree/disagree with X's idea?' 'Does anyone have anything to add to what Y has said?' 'Can anyone help Z make her point more clearly?' 'Can anyone think of other reasons to back up X's view?'

1. Do you think the Outsider children should be given the same opportunities as the people in the city? Which groups were discussing this question? What ideas came up in your groups?

Encourage and broaden discussion with the following questions, as needed:

- *Should the adult Outsiders be given at least some of the same opportunities? What makes you say that? What would it depend on?*
- *What about the children? Is it different for them?*
- *Whose responsibility is it to provide opportunities for the Outsider children - the Outsiders themselves? The people in the city? The city government?*

2. Is it unfair that the Outsider children have much harder lives than the people who live in the city? Which groups were discussing this question? What ideas came up in your groups?

Encourage and broaden discussion with the following questions, as needed:

- *Matt says that the Outsider adults might have chosen to leave the city. If that's true, do they deserve to have hospitals built for them? Do they deserve to be provided with access to food and water? Or do they deserve the life they've got? Give reasons for your answer.*
- *Is it the same for the children? What makes you say that?*
- *(If the students raise the issue of fairness ask): When you talk about fairness, what do you mean? We'll be looking at this idea some more in the next few lessons.*

3. Should the Ligurian government use some of the money the city people pay in taxes to provide schools and hospitals, and access to food and water, for the Outsider children?

Encourage and broaden discussion with the following questions, as needed:

- *Do the city people have a responsibility to help the Outsider children or adults?*
- *Does the government have a responsibility here?*
- *Would it be fair to the city people if the Ligurian government uses some of the money the city people pay in taxes to provide schools and hospitals and access to food and water for the Outsiders?*

4. I have one more question that I would like everyone to think about: Is a fair society possible? Before I take responses I'm going to re-read a part of the dialogue.

 Dewi says, 'The Ligurian world is really unfair - the Outsider children have a horrible life just because they've been born to Outsider parents and not to parents in the city.'

And Matt says, 'Maybe that's just life. Some people are luckier than others. It's like that in our world too. I don't reckon there's anything we can do about it.'

What do you think? Is a fair society possible?

Give students a minute to think.

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Encourage and broaden discussion with the following questions, as needed:

- *Is Matt right when he says that it's like that in our world too?*
- *Is he right when he says that it's just the way life is and that there's nothing anyone can do about it?*
- *If Matt is right, does it matter?*

End the lesson

Over the next 3 lessons, we will spend some more time thinking about these issues together.

Lesson 2: What does it mean to provide equality of opportunity?

For this lesson you will need

- New school rules cards

Remember last lesson

3 minutes

Do you remember the story we read last week?

Can anyone remember some of the big questions you all thought about?

If necessary, remind students that one of the big questions is 'Should the Outsider children be given the same opportunities as the people inside the city?'

Can anyone remember any of the ideas that were put forward in response to this question?

Discussion: when are we justified in treating people differently?

17 minutes

In this lesson, we'll be thinking about what it means to give different people equal opportunities. We'll start by looking at some real life examples.

Suppose that tomorrow morning your teachers announce that the school rules have changed. I'm going to ask you to think about each new rule and decide whether it is fair or unfair and try to say why. *Show Rule 1. Place it on the floor in the middle of the circle so students can refer to it.*

1. Only students with blue eyes can go to PE lessons. Before I ask you to share your thoughts with the class, I'll give you a moment to talk to your neighbor about it.

Allow 20 seconds, then call the class back to order. Remember to ask for reasons, and, if appropriate, reasons for their reasons. Look for underlying principles, not just consequences. Repeat this process for all of the 'rules' in the discussion.

Encourage and broaden discussion with the following questions, as needed:

- *Are students ever made to sit out of PE lessons? If so, why? Can you think of a good reason to exclude someone from PE lessons?*

2. *Show Rule 2.* There will be a new school choir, and any student who wants to can audition for a place.

3. *Show Rule 3.* Only students who sing well in the audition will be chosen for the choir.

Encourage and broaden discussion with the following questions, as needed:

- *What would happen if people who can't sing well are in the choir?*
- *Would children who have had singing lessons out of school and lots of experience with auditions have an unfair advantage? Would that be fair to others?*

4. *Show Rule 4.* Early morning singing lessons will be provided for students who don't sing well but still want to join the choir. After their lessons they will be able to audition again.

Encourage and broaden discussion with the following questions, as needed:

- *Would this give those that haven't had lessons or don't have a natural talent a chance to catch up?*
- *To be fair, should good singers be allowed to get lessons too?*
- *If it were possible to bring everyone to the same starting point, would it be fair to do so?*

5. *Show Rule 5.* Members of the swimming team can't attend singing lessons as they train every morning. So students in the swimming team will be permitted to join the choir even if they fail the second audition.

Encourage and broaden discussion with the following questions, as needed:

- *Is it fair that swimmers can't attend the singing lessons?*
- *Is it fair to let swimmers join the choir even if they can't sing well?*
- *Is it fair to expect swimmers to accept that their choice to join the swim team has consequences – that it narrows their other options?*

Discussion: What are real equal opportunities?

10 minutes

Suppose that one of the teachers at your school is a very good runner and that in PE lessons he coaches his students in how to run fast. He gives them interval-training, leg strengthening exercises, teaches them how to start from the blocks, how to breathe more effectively, as well as lots of competitive running practice. The other teachers don't know much about running at all, and so most children have never been given this sort of coaching.

Now the school decides to start a new running club. Anyone can join the club, and then there will be qualifying races to find the fastest runners. They will be the ones who make up the school athletics team.

1. Does every student have an equal opportunity to join the running club? Which students are most likely to get into the running team? Is that fair? Why, or why not?
2. Is there anything the school could do to make competition for team places fairer? If so, what?
3. Do you think the school should try to make the competition for team places fairer?
4. Do you think that providing all students with the opportunity to join the running club and to take part in the qualifying races is enough to make the club fair? Or do you think that, in order to be fair, the club needs to provide students with equal access to coaching opportunities?

End the lesson

In our next lesson, we will be thinking about what makes laws fair or unfair, and then in the last lesson, what makes a fair or unfair society.

Lesson 3: What makes a law fair?

For this lesson you will need

- 'Changed Laws' slips
- Copies of 'The Ligurian Government Decides' – 7 copies, one for each of the actors

Remember last lesson

2 minutes

Who can remember what we were talking about in our last lesson? *Facilitate a brief discussion*

Discussion Plan: Fairness and equal opportunities

10 minutes

Suppose the Australian government changes our laws. I'm going to put you into 4 small groups, and each group will have a new law to consider. Let's think about whether they would make our society fairer, more unfair or have no effect one way or the other? Make sure you explain why.

Use your preferred method to form 4 groups, and give each group one of the slips with the 'changed laws'. Give groups 2 minutes to discuss, and then recall the groups. Ask a member of each group to read out their law, and then share the ideas that came up in their group. Remember to ask for reasons.

1. Only girls can go to school.
2. Only rich people can vote.
3. In war, women as well as men can fight on the front lines, as long as they have the physical strength to do so.
4. When a female teacher gets married, she must resign her job, but this is not the case for a male teacher.

Discussion Plan: Fairness and equal opportunities (cont.)

10 minutes

1. In the Middle Ages, about 800 years ago, England had a form of government called the Feudal System. The King owned all the land, and he required the managers of that land, the barons, to pay duties to him- to pay taxes, raise armies and so on. The noblemen had serfs, or slaves, who lived and worked on the land. In return, the noblemen agreed to protect their serfs from attacks by outsiders. Serfs were not allowed to leave the land on which they worked. Their children were also serfs and, once they were old enough, had to work the land alongside their parents. They had no choice, and no opportunity to do anything else with their lives. Do you think that Feudal societies were fair? Give your reasons.

Follow up question – ask if students haven't raised these important issues:

- In this system, what factors influence the path your life takes?
 - How much of a role would luck have played in determining the path of your life?
2. Do you think that opportunities such as going to university or seeing a doctor or dentist should be determined by things people have no control over (e.g. whether they were born to rich or poor parents)?
 3. Does this happen in Liguria?
 4. Does it happen in our own society?

Returning to the big questions

8 minutes

Let's think again about two of our big questions. I'm interested in hearing whether any of you have changed your views as a result of our discussions. If so, why?

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The two questions are:

1. Should the Outsider children be given the same opportunities as the city children?
2. Is it unfair that the Outsider children have much harder lives than the children whose parents live in the city?

Facilitate a discussion of these questions again. Encourage and broaden discussion with the following questions, as needed:

- *Does anyone want to remind us of the reasons they had in our first lesson?*
- *If someone disagreed with you, what might their reason be?*

End the lesson

In our next lesson, we will be raising the question of what, if anything, the Ligurian government should do to help the Outsider children.

I need 7 students to act out the next episode of the series. Who would like a part? *Choose 7 students, and give each a copy of the script and ask them to read it through before the next lesson.*

Lesson 4. The government's responsibilities

For this lesson you will need

- Copies of the story 'The Ligurian Government Decides' – one for each student

Introduction to lesson

1 minute

In this lesson, we'll be tackling the remaining two big questions of this topic:

1. Should the Ligurian government use some of the money the city people pay in taxes to provide schools and hospitals for the Outsiders?
2. Is a fair society possible?

To help us think through these questions, let's hear how the Ligurian government thinks they should handle the Outsiders. Are our actors ready? *You may need to give out extra copies of the play if a child has forgotten to bring their copy. Hand out copies to the other students so they can follow along. Allow a few minutes for actors to organise themselves and for the others to read the script through in silence.*

Role play: The Ligurian Government Decides

4 minutes

Have the actors run the play.

Narrator: The Ligurian government has decided to allow the Outsider children to enter the city every day to go to school with children from the city. The government wants to be fair. But it has a problem. The Outsider children have never seen books and they can't read or write.

So they have to be taught differently, and if they are ever going to catch up with the city children they will need the best teachers, special classes and more time at school.

But that will cost money - a lot more money than the government has.

So the Ligurian government has to make a decision: either give up on the Outsider children or get some more money from somewhere. The Prime Minister calls a meeting and all members of the government sit down to discuss the issue. The Minister for Finance speaks first.

Minister for Finance: The best way to get more money for the Outsider's schools is to take money away from the city children's schools. We could have fewer teachers at the city schools and have bigger classes, so that the Outsider schools could have more teachers and smaller classes. We could even make the school day shorter for city children so that their teachers could go and give extra help to the Outsider children at the end of the day.

Narrator: Next, it's the Education Minister's turn.

Education Minister: That can't be a good thing, because it will lower the standard of education at city schools. And if we want to solve the many problems we have in our new world, we need people with a great understanding of maths, science, history... A better idea would be to put all the Outsiders in with the city children. Then the really smart ones will manage, especially if they work hard, and the rest, well... really, there is a limit to what we can do.

Narrator: But the Minister for Justice has an even better idea.

Minister for Justice: I have an even better idea. We need to put taxes up. Look, we have Gill Bates, the IT whizz- he has billions! And that old soccer player - David Peckham - and that even older TV star, Hoprah. Why don't we make them pay a bit more tax? It wouldn't hurt them, and it would do a lot of good for the Outsider children.

Prime Minister: That's really unfair! Gill Bates and David Peckham and Hoprah have got incredible talents. Surely they deserve to be rewarded. And on top of that they've worked really

hard. So they deserve to keep most of the money they have earned.

Narrator: The Vice President isn't so sure.

Vice President: I'm not so sure... They're just lucky – lucky to be born with those talents. It's not really something they can take credit for. It's like winning the lottery. If you win the lottery it's just luck. You haven't done anything to deserve it.

And as for working hard, well, loads of people work hard and don't earn much at all. Bates, Peckham and Hoprah - they're rich because they were lucky! Lucky to be born with talents that are valued very highly in our world. The Outsider students were unlucky, and we need to help them. So I reckon the wealthy members of our community should pay more tax. If we want a fair society, that's what we need to do.

Narrator: The Minister for Transport has the last word.

Minister for Transport: Sure, some people are lucky and others aren't. And that leads to big inequalities. The outsiders are living in horrible conditions and some city people live in great luxury. But that's just life and the government is not obliged to do anything about it. It's not as though Bates, Peckham and Hoprah have done anything wrong - to the Outsiders or to anyone else.

So I think the Education minister is right. We must ensure that we give the Outsider children equal access to education, so that we're not discriminating against them. We should let them enroll in the city schools along with the city kids. But that's all we need to do. It's fair to everyone.

Discussion: What should the government do?

15 minutes

Now I'd like you to decide what you think the Ligurian government should do. Discuss it with the person next to you for a minute. You will need to look back over the views of each of the government members, and try to work out for yourself which is the fairest. *Give students a minute or two.*

Let's hear some of your ideas. And remember to give your reasons.

Once students have returned to the circle, facilitate a whole group discussion of the above question. Use the questions below, as needed, to introduce new ideas, encourage discussion or bring a digressing discussion back on track. Encourage students to refer to what each minister said when they give their views.

If students find the task difficult, you could prompt them with the following questions. Refer them back to the arguments given by the ministers, where appropriate.

- 1. Is it ever fair to give more help to some people than to others? If so, give examples. (Refer to the Finance minister's view.)*
- 2. Suppose that when the government divides up the money it has for education between outsider and city schools, there isn't enough to give anyone a good education. Would this be a good outcome? (Refer to the Education minister's view.)*
- 3. Do you think the government is obliged to do something to help people like the Outsider children, who are disadvantaged through no fault of their own? (Refer to the Vice-president's view.)*
- 4. In his online lectures on the topic of fairness (or justice, as he calls it), Michael Sandel from Harvard University in the US asks us to imagine two construction workers, one big and strong, and the other small and weedy. The first worker can build a wall in three hours; the second weedy one, takes three days.*
 - Which worker has put more effort into building his wall?*
 - Does that mean we should pay him more?*

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- *In our society, do people get paid for the effort they put in, or what they produce? (Refer to the Vice-president's view.)*
- 5. *Do Gill Bates, David Peckham and Hoprah deserve the money they earn? (Refer to both the President's and Vice president's views.)*
- 6. *Is it fair for the government to increase these people's taxes in order to help the Outsider children?*
- 7. *Do you think a fair society is possible?*

Optional activity (if time permits)

10 minutes

This class is a community, so let's take a few minutes to think about the way that class communities work.

1. Do teachers, at times, give more help to some students than others (in Maths, say, or English)? If so, is this fair? If not, is it fair that they don't?
2. Are students rewarded (praised, given prizes or other rewards) for working hard- in sport, music, maths or art...? If so, is this fair? If not, is this fair?
3. Are students rewarded for getting good grades or playing well in music or sport? If so, is this fair? If not, is this fair?
4. Do all members of the class have to follow the classroom rules? If so, is this fair? If not, is this fair?

End the lesson

That's the end of this topic. You might like to think about our own society and see if you can come up with any real life situations that you, and perhaps lots of other people, think are unfair. Try to work out why it is that those situations are allowed to continue.

~~~END OF TOPIC~~~

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