FREE PERIOD:

Modeling Conflicting Points of View in Respectful, Engaging, & Entertaining Ways

This handout was originally created for the American Association of School Librarians 2023 Conference Panel titled *Glitter, Cochlear Implants & Period Equity: Books That Model Conflicting Points of View in Respectful, Engaging & Entertaining Ways*, featuring Becky Calzada (AASL President-Elect), Chris Barton (Glitter Everywhere!), Kerry O'Malley Cerra (Hear Me), and Ali Terese (Free Period).

It includes three activities to facilitate discussion after reading FREE PERIOD (Scholastic - March 2024):

1. Exploring and identifying different types of conflict to work toward solutions.
2. Discovering how to use a special skill or interest you already enjoy to create change.
3. Practicing empathy as a path toward building common ground.

FREE PERIOD is a middle grade story of friendship and period equity chock full of bestie banter, wildly weird craft, and delightfully disgusting desserts:

This middle-grade Moxie centering period equity is Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret for the next generation! Helen and Gracie are pranking their way through middle school when a stinky stunt lands them in the front office -- again. Because nothing else has curbed their chaos, the principal orders the best friends to do the unthinkable: care about something. So they join the school's Community Action Club with plans to do as little as humanly possible.

But when Helen is caught unprepared by an early period and bleeds through her pants -- they were gold lamé! -- the girls take over the club's campaign for maxi pads in bathrooms for all students who menstruate. In the name of period equity, the two friends use everything from over-the-top baked goods to glitter gluing for change. But nothing can prepare them for a clueless school board (ew), an annoying little sister (ugh), and crushes (oh my!).

As Helen and Gracie find themselves closer to change and in deeper trouble than ever before, they must decide if they care enough to keep going . . . even if it costs them their friendship.

Visit https://aliterese.com/ for more activities, discussion guides, crafts, and giveaways, and feel free to reach out at alitereseauthor@gmail.com!

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EXPLORE: CONFLICT TYPES

FREE PERIOD is full of conflict, whether it is about getting pads in bathrooms for all students who menstruate, hanging with besties when parents object, or the eternal question of whether soft cheeses are glorious proof of meaning in the universe or a serious cause of stinky farts. Spoiler alert on that last one: they're both true!

But the way these conflicts are resolved depends on the type of disagreement that the students face in each instance. Problem solving when you can't even agree that a problem exists is very different from agreeing on a solution but loathing each other so much that you can't figure out how to work together.

Let's explore three types of conflict together—(1) substance, (2) process, and (3) interpersonal—based on our reading of FREE PERIOD. Then it will be your turn to apply these types to a real-life situation!

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CONFLICT CHART

Type	Issue	FREE PERIOD Ex.	First step	FREE PERIOD Ex.
Substance	Disagreement on whether there is a problem at all, on defining the problem, or how it should be solved.	Not everyone believes that there should be pads in all the bathrooms or that they should be paid for by the school district.	Find a meaningful point of agreement or shared value.	Students use the starting point that no child should miss class because they have a period and build from that shared value.
Process	Agreement on the problem and maybe even the solution, but not on how to advocate for change.	Madison wants to make their case in front of the school board and prove their concept with fundraising and a pilot program while Helen wants to chain herself to the toilet and make the library walls bleed until the board has no choice but to pay attention and act.	Compare approaches for where they complement and where they cancel each other out to and ask if they can be combined in a way that is even better that the original ideas.	Students use the enthusiasm they've generated through all the Gracie and Helen shenanigans to drive people to the school board where Madison makes room for more voices and Helen's mean math in the budget.
Interpersonal	Agreement on most things but really REALLY don't like each other AT ALL or it isn't that dramatic, but you're just not vibing at the moment. Eh, it happens.	Madison and Helen can't stand each other. Even when they recognize the other is doing something good–Madison using statements from the school board to convince the PTA to act while those efforts were bolstered by Helen researching the PTA's past actions–they still refuse to work together.	You don't have to be friends or even like each other to work together. You don't need to feel guilty about that, either. Try to see something in the other person to respect enough to combine forces for this limited exercise.	Helen recognizes that Madison has a talent for working with anyone but needs to make space for those other people to shine rather than just supporting her. Helen recognizes her own power in deciding what she says and what she keeps to herself, because she can be strategic rather than always showing she's the smartest person in the room.

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YOUR TURN!

Pick an issue you care about—maybe it is an equity issue at school or something you're experiencing at home. Examples might include disagreements over chore distribution, which extracurricular activity to pursue, or even how you communicate when you disagree. Tease out the specific types of conflict involved to see if that helps you find first steps toward solutions.

Type	Issue	First step	New common ground?
Substance			
Process			
Interpersonal			

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ACTIVITY: CRAFTIVISM POWER

One of the main messages of FREE PERIOD is that if your crush makes you enjoy the great outdoors, you can never really forgive either of you. Looking at you, Michael F.! Fresh air. Shudder. Another is that advocacy doesn't have to be fancy or formal, it can be fun, and all of us already have a special skill or interest that we can connect with to create change.

In Chapter 23, when it seems like all hope is lost on the pad project, Gracie gets her gel pens out and makes the case to her parent on why she should keep going: "Just because I say things in glitter and rainbows and makeup and fart jokes and cupcakes doesn't mean those things I say matter less than what other people put in spreadsheets. Which, by the way, is a truly weird word."

It is all true! From delightfully disgusting sweets that get people talking, to using her gossip skills to figure out who really influences the school board, to seeing how shenanigans can motivate friends when facts and figures aren't enough, Gracie uses what she already loves in life to create change.

And so can you! That's right, it is time to glitter-brain and synapse-swirl about all your special skills and interests. Go ahead and draw a smiley cloud and dancing cupcake right now like Gracie in Chapter 27 if the blank spaces on the next page is too harsh to work with.

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YOU GOT THIS!

1.What is a need in your community?

2.What are all the ways you've spent your free time over the last month? Or how you wanted to spend your free time if it was up to you?

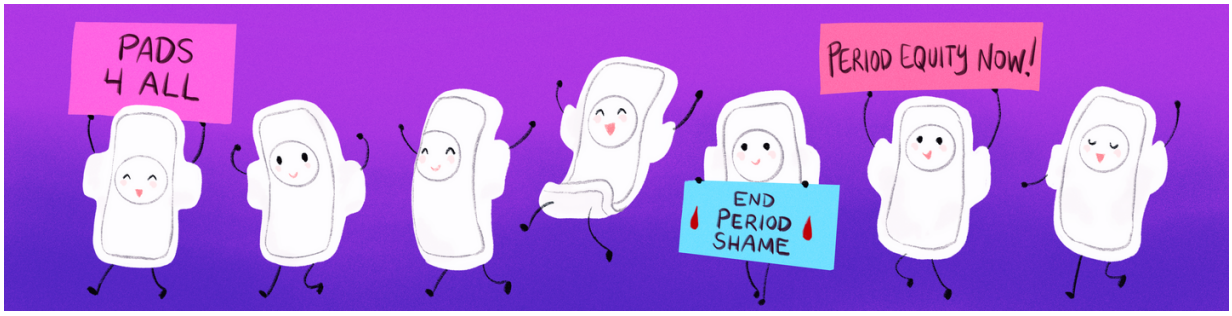
3.Which of those activities are most likely to connect to the community need you identified?

4.Which of those activities is least likely to create change in your community?

5.Yeah, that least likely is the one to explore. I know. Annoying, right? How can you use that interest or skill to raise awareness and drive interest in the issue you care about?

6.Now here is the really fun part. Do the same for a friend (or frenemy—I don't know your business!) because sometimes it is our friends who can see what's special in us when we can't. What is a friend's skill they could use to create change?

7.Now share with each other and be totally embarrassed but also wow and be wowed by all the fabulousness in this room!



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PADS ON PARADE ORIGINAL ART FROM THE WORLD OF FREE PERIOD © 2023 BEV JOHNSON

ACTIVITY: EMPATHY GLASSES ON!

In Chapter 19, Gracie, Madison, and Isabella consider how the people against the period product plan see the world when they're writing a social media post to win over some hearts and minds.

The students could be "nice" and just let those objections go, but they decide to use their empathy superpowers. Instead, they explore the cluelessness that prevents others from understanding the need for all students to have access to maxi-pads and find a shared value or need to build on. In this case, like in all the greatest debates in human history, that shared need is pooping.

Let's break down how the students used empathy in resolving conflict and then it will be your turn on the next page!

1.Gracie, Madison, and Isabella smudge cluelessness all over their imaginary glasses: Opponents say kids needing pads in the bathroom are trying to get freebies at school.

2.Then they try to understand how that worldview stops their opponents from understanding the need: Thinking of something as a freebie means the kids are trying to get something they don't need and aren't entitled to.

3.When Madison makes a snide comment about Gracie's need for another personal product—her all-natural deodorant from Chapter 1—Gracie realizes the girls have dealt with a similar situation before: Madison couldn't understand how someone could smell like Gracie and feel good about themselves at school. But periods aren't the same as pits: while kids can come to school smelling different from each other, a student with a period can't be at their desk learning without period products.

4.So they end up on another indispensable personal item that all students need and no one calls a freebie: toilet paper.

5.In their social media post, the girls tap into the panic, embarrassment, and hopelessness people feel when they have to go to the bathroom and can't find any toilet paper to try to get their opponents to understand that kids feel those same things when they're bleeding and don't have a pad.

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YOUR TURN!

Identify a need you want to explore:

Who disagrees with you:

Using the template on the next page, write or draw examples on the glasses of what is blocking people from understanding the need you're communicating. Yes, of course you should use all the gel pens in the rainbow!

Pick one clueless smudge and work out how you might clear it up using your empathy superpower.

1.Clueless smudge:

2.How does it block the person from seeing your need?

3.Have you experienced a similar situation before? How did it affect your emotions or thinking?

4.What common value or need do you share that can help the person work through that emotion and understand your need?

5.How can you build on that shared value or need to help your opponent tap into a need they do understand to make your case?

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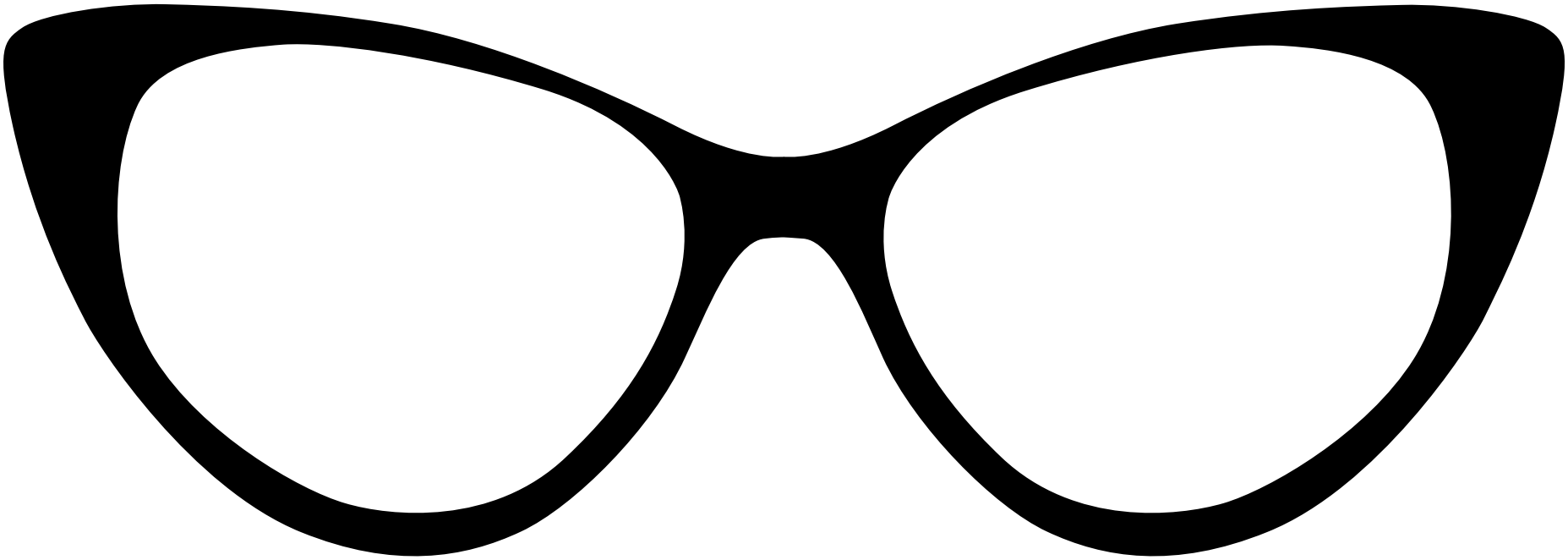
EMPATHY GLASSES



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