

A Temple in Sleepyville

The activity presents a problem to be solved by engaging participants in roles and discussion. In this scenario, all participants are citizens of Sleepyville and all are troubled by the problem of whether a new "Temple" (mosque, church, synagogue etc.) should be built on a piece of derelict council land.

The activity divides participants into roles with the use of cards. All participants have their own role to discuss whether to allow a new community to build a new temple or not.



Inclusion, Diversity & Tolerance
Participation in democratic life
and civic engagement



Role play, debate



13+



20-30 participants



Cards, Paper, Pencil, Voting Box.



Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft
Teams, or similar video
conference platforms



150-180 minutes duration



YOU.TH. Manual for youth workers
- 3.3 Theatre Methodologies -
Role Play
<https://youth-theatre.eu/>



In face to face the activity can be
performed in a classroom, hall or
outdoor.

If played online it is important
that all participants have access
to the Internet.

Implementation:

DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY

1. Read out the description of the problem in the handout. Explain that all participants are citizens of Sleepyville and all are troubled by the problem of whether a new temple (church, mosque, synagogue... etc.) should be built on a piece of derelict council land.
2. Show participants the list of different roles and ask everyone to select one for themselves. Hand out the role-cards and the description of the problem and indicate where people and groups can meet up beforehand, and where the "Council Meeting" will take place later on. Help the group in the division of roles encouraging them to cover all the roles in the game. Taking a role doesn't mean that they think that way, it can be even a bigger and enthusiastic experience to challenge themselves to take a role opposite to how they would act in their normal life.
3. Explain the rules of debate that will be used during the meeting.
4. Explain that they will have 30 minutes before the actual meeting so that people can meet other citizens, prepare what they want to say and decide how they want to vote! Tell them that the Town Council Meeting will last 40 minutes, and that there may be very little time for actual speeches because of the number of people attending. For that reason, they should try to prepare just one or two points that they want to expose to the rest of the community.
5. Use the preparation phase to set up the space for the "Council Meeting". Ideally, people should sit in a semi-circle or horseshoe shape, with the Mayor at the front, in a slightly elevated position. Parties or groups should be able to sit together, and you should place their name tags on the tables in front.
6. After 30 minutes, call the citizens for the meeting (or ask the Mayor to do so). The Mayor should remind people of the basic rules of debate and give a short speech to introduce the meeting.

Implementation:

7. At the end of the meeting, after 40 minutes, the Mayor should call for a vote. When the votes have been counted and the result declared, you should announce the end of the activity, and invite people to bring their chairs into a circle for the debriefing.

Below is the story of the Sleepyville and its population, as well is described the issue the community has.

Strongly recommended, the story should be printed and shared with all participants or at least one copy per group.

In the next pages you can find a full page to be printed out with only the following story.

A Temple in Sleepyville (for all participants)

You live in the picturesque town of Sleepyville, a town of about 80,000 people. In the last 60 years the population has changed radically, partly because young people mostly try to move to larger cities as job opportunities there are better, but also because the region has seen the arrival of a large number of immigrant families. Some of these families have been here for 3 generations, but they are still treated with suspicion as “newcomers” by many people in the town. They now make up almost 15% of the total population.

The issue is the proposal to build a new “TEMPLE” in Sleepyville, it would be built on a piece of derelict land belonging to the council. This land has been undeveloped and has been a source of complaints to the council for years: it is near the main shopping street and is an area where vandalism and drug circulation have been a regular problem.

So, when a rich businessman offered to take the problem off the Council’s hands, the Mayor thought their lucky day had come! The Council readily agreed to give up the land and fund 20% of the construction costs for a new temple on the site. The remaining 10% of the building costs, which the businessman could not cover, were to be found among the community. The building was meant to start this week... but the Council has been flooded with complaints from residents who object to the project. They have called a special meeting, to which all are invited, to resolve this issue. The meeting will take place in 30 minutes.

Implementation:

Role cards have to be delivered to each group.

Role card: Town Council member: *Populist Party (1 or 2 people)* You represent the Populist Party on the Town Council. You supported the original decision to have the Temple built on the land, partly because you realise that the community has been very good for the economy of the town and you do not want to alienate them.

But you have been very worried by complaints from residents and do not want to create an unnecessary conflict in the community.

You are also concerned about your seat in the next council elections, so you will probably support whichever option appears to be least controversial.

Role card: Town Council member: *Diversity Party (1 or 2 people)* You represent the Diversity Party on the Town Council. You believe that the relatively large proportion of people from different parts of the world has added to the culture and interest of Sleepyville and you have felt it unfair that the town has deprived many of these people of the opportunity to practice their religion for so long. You can also see that the derelict land is causing social problems in the town and that the Council does not at the moment have the money to develop it themselves.

Role card: Members of the “Past and Present” *Association of Sleepyville (2-4 people)* You are one of the main groups opposed to this Temple. Your members are from traditional communities in Sleepyville, and you think it is very important to keep the ancient character of the town, where most of you have lived all your lives.

The site that is proposed for the Temple is very central and it would be visible from most places in the town centre. In particular, the new Temple could block out the view of the main temple (church or mosque, synagogue, other...) from the town square. You feel that the character of your hometown is being completely changed by a community that arrived here only recently. You do not see why people who arrived in this country from somewhere else should not live by the same rules and traditions as you have here.

Implementation:

Role card: Town Council member: *Traditionalist Party (1 or 2 people)* You represent the Traditionalist Party on the Town Council, and you are strongly opposed to the new Temple. You do not think it is right that council land and council resources should be spent on a place of worship that does not respect the traditions of this country and this town. You feel that immigrant families are privileged to be allowed to live here and that they should not try to impose different lifestyles on a country where they are guests.

Role card: Members of the Youth Action Group “Young Sleepies for Human Rights!” (2-4 people) Your group was set up to address some of the worst problems for young people today in Sleepyville. You see the building of the new Temple as a solution both to the new community’s need for a place of worship, and as a solution to the numerous social problems which have been a result of the land being left derelict for so long. You support the building of this new Temple but you are concerned that other social problems may be neglected by the Council if they have to contribute to the building. In particular, the youth budget over the past 5 years has been cut to a level where it cannot begin to meet the needs of the town.

Role card: Members of the “*new Temple Association of Sleepyville*” (2-4 people) You have been asking the Council for years to provide a place of worship for the new community, but it has always been refused on financial grounds. You feel that it is unfair that the new community is being asked to find 10% of the building costs, when economic conditions are so harsh for most people, and when the other religious communities have 11 different places of worship and these are used by far fewer people than the new Temple would be.

You feel that the contribution that your community has made to the town is not appreciated, that people in your community are unfairly discriminated against in various aspects of their life, and that in refusing to allow this new Temple, the council is denying members of your community their fundamental right to religious worship.

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Implementation:

Role card: *Citizens of Sleepyville* You are worried about the conflict that seems to have taken over the town of Sleepyville and you want to go to the meeting of *the Town Council in order to vote*. At the moment you do not know what you will vote for: you need to speak to as many different groups as you can and then you plan to make up your mind.

Role card: *The Mayor of Sleepyville* You are the Chair of the assembly and it will be your role, once the meeting starts, to welcome the participants and remind them of the rules of debate. During the meeting, you should try to give everyone the opportunity to speak – and should not allow anyone to speak for too long! You are very worried about the bad publicity that this case has been attracting and you plan to try, before the meeting, to speak to some of the groups to try to persuade them to soften their position.

Debriefing

To debrief, start the feedback round by greeting everybody by their real names, this is a technique to help participants to give up the roles they had assumed during the simulation. This is important to do before starting the debriefing. Ask the participants what they feel about the process they have just been through:

- Were you surprised by the result of the vote, and did it reflect the position of the person you were playing?
- How much influence do you think you (in your role) had on the result?
- Did interaction with other people or groups make you alter your approach or your attitude towards the problem?
- How easy was it to identify with your role? Why or why not?
- Do you think that this situation could arise in real life? Can you think of any similar cases?
- How would you react if this case arose in your town/place of residence? Did the activity alter your attitude at all?
- What do you understand by the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion? Do you know of any cases in history (or today) when this right has been denied?
- Why do you think that religious freedom is a fundamental human right?
- To what extent do you think this right is observed in your community?

Tips and notes to the facilitator

- The activity's role can be changed as building a different temple in the community or creating a Center for the community (refugee center or also a cultural center).
- If you run it online be sure to set up the breakout rooms in advance.
- If possible, you should run this activity together with a co-facilitator in order to be able to answer questions and coordinate each step of the activity at the same time.
- The activity could benefit from having more time available, particularly during the actual meeting, so that people have the chance to respond to comments made by others.
- You may also allocate the roles beforehand or allocate roles randomly in order to save time during the session.
- During the preparation phase, it may be useful to check that people are using the time to plan what they are going to say during the meeting. You can go from group to group as observer.
- When assigning the roles, note that the role of the mayor is a very demanding one, and that the person playing it will need to feel confident about facilitating the meeting and – if necessary – cutting people short in order to allow everyone to speak. You will need to go through the task with the participant playing the mayor before the actual simulation.
- It is highly desirable that, you try to leave facilitation entirely to the person playing the Mayor, both in order that they feel your trust and in order to stimulate the other participants' respect for their decisions rather than looking to you. Of course, if difficulties arise, you may find it necessary to intervene in the course of the simulation. You should, however, try to do this without undermining the authority of the participant playing the Mayor.
- If the simulation gets out of control – for example, because people stray off the topic or new pieces of information are invented – or if the Council gets caught in a deadlock and cannot come to an agreement, point out that this can reflect a result in real life, and does not indicate that the activity has failed. You can use this in the debriefing at the end to discuss the difficulty of reaching an agreement on issues such as these.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Learning to play a role
- Experiencing the role and difficulty of decision-making for the community
- Develop critical thinking and problem solving
- To experience real conflicts that can arise in meeting the needs of diverse communities
- To explore the right to freedom of religion and belief
- To develop skills in debate and analysis
- Valuing/respect of other human being
- Valuing/respect for cultural differences and diversity
- Communicative awareness

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