PATHWAYS
INSTITUTE FOR NEGOTIATION EDUCATION

THE LADDER OF INFERENCE IN MENDING WALL
BY ROBERT FROST

A negotiation teaching tool created by

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OBJECTIVES

- To understand *The Ladder of Inference*
- To understand the literary term *Metaphor*
- To understand the Higher Order Thinking Skill (HOTS) of *Distinguishing Different Perspectives*
- To apply these terms and skills to the characterization of the narrator and the neighbor in Mending Wall by Robert Frost.

TIME REQUIRED IN CLASSROOM

2-3 lessons (90 mins-2 hrs.)

*Note: This lesson should only take place after reading the whole poem, understanding the basic vocabulary and the Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS).

Possible assignment before beginning this series of lessons:

Rewrite the poem in regular (vernacular) English. (Can be done for homework and then checked in class)

LEAD-IN / PREP

Teacher will prepare pictures of various walls in the world (both present and past) and research their respective histories/uses.

Teacher will prepare definitions of "Ladder of Inference", "Distinguishing Different Perspectives" and "Metaphor".

ACTIVITIES

1. Show slides of different walls from around the world (both present and past)

   [e.g. The Great Wall of China; The Berlin Wall; The Western Wall; stone walls in New England, USA; the barrier wall in the West Bank, Wall of Stone, Croatia; Hadrians Wall, England; ancient walls of Istanbul, Turkey; The Cannon wall of Mogador, Morocco; The Vietnam Soldiers Memorial Wall, Washington DC]

   * Note: Walls have been built since ancient times, to mark borders, protect kingdoms and settlements, or keep out unwanted people. In more recent times, walls have also been built to serve as memorials and structures of art.

   Class discussion: What are the different kinds of walls and what are their different uses/purposes?

2. <u>Metaphor</u> - a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable.

   Examples   -Danny is the *black sheep* of the family

        -The snow is a *white blanket.*

   Class activity – elicit other metaphors in English and in Hebrew/Arabic from the students
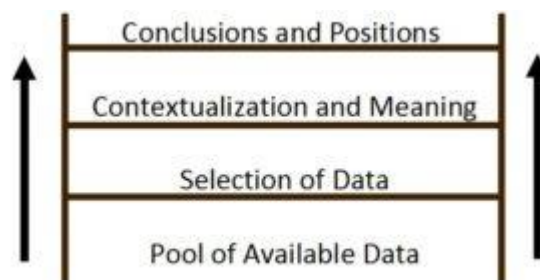
3. Higher Order Thinking Skill (HOTS) of <u>Distinguishing Different Perspectives</u>: two (or more) characters see the same thing or situation yet understand/analyze it differently.

Look at the following picture and ask the students to write down what they see. Elicit students' reactions to this picture. Ask the students to reveal what they saw and wrote.

Ask - How many classmates saw the same things? Why do you think you saw different things?
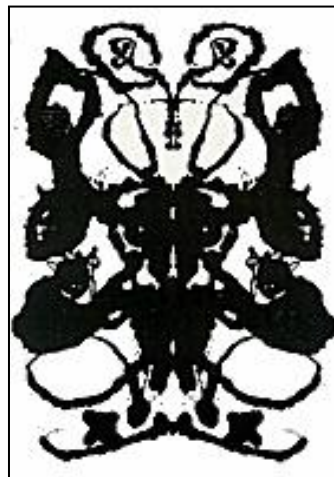
4. <u>The Ladder of Inference</u> - describes the thinking process that we go through, usually without realizing it, to get from a fact to a decision or action. The thinking stages can be seen as rungs on a ladder.

Conclusions and Positions

Contextualization and Meaning

Selection of Data

Pool of Available Data

Define the terms presented in the Ladder of Inference:

Selection of Data

We are standing in a pool of data at all times, comprised of everything from the smell of your morning coffee to the book you are reading. Because we have a limited amount of processing power at any given time, <u>our brains make a decision</u> as to what is worth focusing on.

Contextualization and Meaning

Once a person has selected the information and processed it, they then place it within the context of their experiences. People assign meaning to this raw data.

Conclusion and Positions

The final step of the ladder is to reach a conclusion or position. Based on the selected information, bolstered by the context within which it was placed, we formulate our ideas.

Consider the following situation:

Dan, who was sick, missed several days of school. He sent his friend, Ron, a message, asking him to send the English homework assignment as soon as possible. Ron was at a party when he received the message and didn't remember the assignment by heart, so he planned to send him the homework assignment the next day. When Dan didn't get the information he needed, he sent another message to Ron saying he needed the homework assignment "now"! Ron wrote back that "now" was sooner than he was able to do it.

Dan returned to school the next day and was angry at Ron for being unresponsive and irresponsible. Ron was angry at Dan for being so pushy.

Use the Ladder of Inference to better understand Dan's and Ron's perspectives.
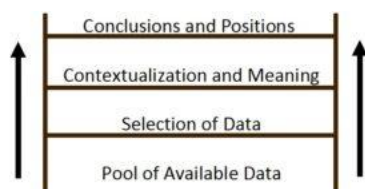
Summary:

How can two people, receiving the same data at the same time, come to such different conclusions?

By better understanding the process of how we reach conclusions, we can improve our negotiation skills and more effectively understand and influence others.
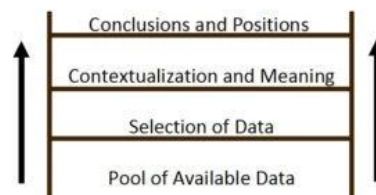
Application to the poem

1. Reread the poem Mending Wall and listen to professional recording of the poem: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DL7CklKfxa4

2. Draw a ladder of Inference for each of the characters in the poem. Answer the following questions to help you.

a. What is the conflict between the narrator and the neighbor in Mending Wall by Frost?
b. What is the pool of data available to both the narrator and the neighbor?
c. What is each of the characters' perspective?
d. What is the experience of each character in the poem that led him to believe this?

The Narrator:

Conclusions and Positions

Contextualization and Meaning

Selection of Data

Pool of Available Data

The Neighbor:

Conclusions and Positions

Contextualization and Meaning

Selection of Data

Pool of Available Data

e. Do you think either of the characters succeed in convincing the other to come to his way of thinking in the poem?

*Note: By going up the Ladder of Inference each student understands the source of the characters perspective on the given situation and can distinguish their different perspectives toward the wall.

After walking down the other person's ladder of inference you gain a better understanding of the data and context that led to their conclusion and appreciate the process the characters went through as they processed information and created the conclusions about the content of the negotiation.

3. In class – pairs of students write and present a dialogue/role play of the two characters (the narrator and the neighbor) verbalizing their different perspectives and how they arrived at their respective conclusions.

VOCABULARY / GRAMMAR

boulders, gaps, abreast, spell, wear, mischief, notion, grasped, savage, armed

ASSESSMENT

Can be done as a graded writing assignment, journal entry or short answer homework assignment.

REFLECTION

Is there a negotiation in this poem? Do the two people resolve their differences? (If yes, how/why? If no, how not/why not?)

How did understanding metaphor, the HOTS of Distinguishing Different Perspectives and the Ladder of Inference add to or change my understanding of the poem?

Class discussion: What are some metaphoric walls in the world/our society? Is the wall in this poem a metaphor? What could it represent?

Are there any walls (physical or metaphoric) in your lives or in the world that bring about the need to negotiate? What is your Ladder of Inference and what is the Ladder

of Inference of those on the other side of your "walls"? How can understanding each other's perspectives help us bring down or at least lower these walls?

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