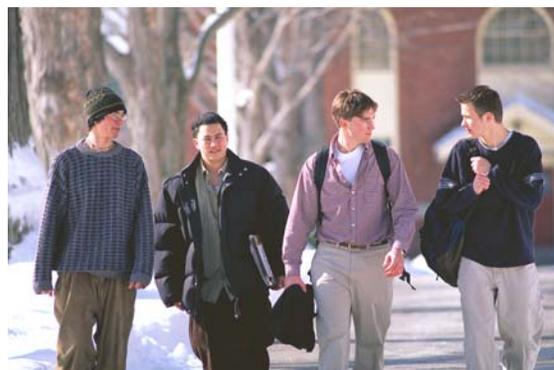


Teacher Notes: A Continuum of Points of View

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The Continuum of Points of View is an effective activity that elicits an exchange of opinions, beliefs, and values. Students place themselves at a point on a continuum where they feel comfortable on an issue, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." This activity allows students to explore their own preconceptions, learn about the perspectives of others, and reflect on changes in their points of view.



Using a continuum of points of view helps students recognize that there is a wide range of perspectives on many social issues. It is a means of encouraging them to make their presuppositions explicit, to justify their positions, and to actively listen to others to understand their perspectives. It offers a useful alternative to debate, for questions in which it is difficult to identify a black/white position or a winning/losing argument.

The following is a suggested method for using a continuum activity to explore questions about the influence of mass media and pop culture in relation to Canadian culture and identity. It may be adapted to suit a variety of topics in this course.

Encourage students to be spontaneous and frank in this activity, and to not concern themselves with discussing the issue with their peers until after they have found their own position on the continuum. Emphasize the idea that, in this activity, there are no "right" or "wrong" positions, and all perspectives are equally valid.

Suggested procedure:

1. Select and introduce a question on which there is a wide range of possible approaches and beliefs. In this case, the class may choose to explore a question such as the following:

How great is the influence of mass media on the identity of Canadian youth?
OR
Is there a distinctively Canadian culture apart from American popular culture as portrayed in the mass media?

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2. Encourage students to take a few seconds to silently reflect on the ideas that spontaneously come to mind, using their general knowledge of contemporary Canadian society and media.
3. Clear a space in the classroom (or go into the hallway) so that students may move around and situate themselves along a line or continuum showing a gradation of opinion.
4. Indicate the centre-point of the continuum with masking tape on the floor.
5. Indicate both extremes of the continuum with a descriptive statement taped to either facing wall. For example, on one end of the continuum:

Mass media completely determine how Canadian youth think, the decisions they make, the way they live, and how they express themselves.

OR

There is no distinctive Canadian culture apart from what is portrayed in the American mass media. We are part of the same popular culture.

On the other end of the continuum, place a marker stating the other extreme point of view on the subject:

Canadian youth are culturally diverse. Their identities, decisions, lifestyles, and values are not influenced at all by mass media and pop culture.

OR

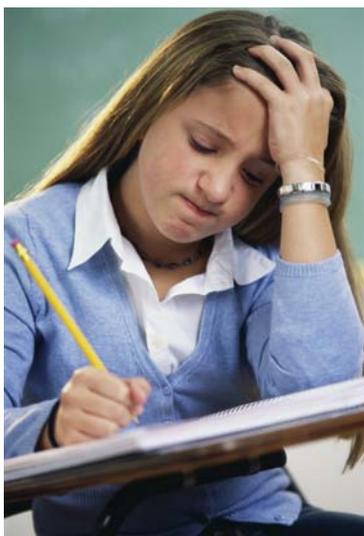
Canadians support cultural diversity and a unique Canadian identity. Canadian culture is in no danger whatsoever of being overtaken by American mass media and pop culture.

6. After students have reflected on their own positions, invite them to place themselves at a point on the continuum where they feel most comfortable, judging by how strongly they agree with the statements at either end and at the mid-point. (It may be helpful to ask students to sketch out on graph paper where they feel they stand between the continuum endpoints before the actually move into position.) When they are all in position, ask them to silently consider why they believe as they do.

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7. Ask students to move toward a person who is far away from them on the continuum and to partner up with that person to exchange ideas. The exchange of ideas should proceed as follows: first, one partner explains her or his point of view without interruption (1-2 minutes); then, they switch and the second partner explains his or her position and its justification without interruption (1-2 minutes). Remind students that the purpose of this exchange is *not* to convince their partners to change their points of view, but to understand other perspectives and to explain their own.



8. Debrief in a general discussion, inviting students to share what they learned about their own view and their partner's view, and to observe where most of the class members found themselves on the continuum. Encourage students to consider examples of various reasons for the divergence of opinion in the classroom (e.g., cultural background, access and exposure to media, personal experience, travel...).
9. Students may be asked to write an Exit Slip or a short journal reflection on the exercise. You may choose to revisit the exercise at the end of a learning experience or cluster so that students may consider whether their initial beliefs have changed or not.

