

## **Pyramids: Are you honest?**

Aleksandra Golebiowska's "pyramid" is an excellent technique for promoting class discussion. However, the "pyramid" is not used just to generate lots of discussion; it also helps with the understanding of a general concept.

In the first stage of this particular exercise, each student individually ranks the people described in (a) through (j) from the most moral to the least moral, with number 1 being the most moral and number 10 being the least moral.

In stage two, students divide up into pairs. After comparing their rankings, each pair works out a single ranking between them.

In stage three, after coming to an agreement, the pairs of students get together into fours. The groups of four then compare, discuss, and agree on a single ranking.

In stage four, the fours then combine into eights and the process continues. And so on.

Of course, in reality some adjustments need to be made. First, classes do not usually have exactly eight, sixteen, or thirty-two students in them. Thus, at stage two some of the pairs will actually consist of, not two, but three students. Also, if the teacher decides that the whole process would take too much time, the pyramid can be stopped after stage three or stage four, with either the discussion becoming a whole-class discussion or with the activity simply being dropped.

This pyramid technique is marvelous for practicing language and for developing understanding of concepts. In this case, we are using the technique for discussing degrees of honesty.

Begin by handing out copies of the student worksheet. Have the students read the descriptions of the people in (a) through (j), and answer whatever questions they may have about vocabulary and so on.

Although help with the language has already been provided on the student worksheet, further language work is needed before the actual discussion starts.

Begin the basic language work with description (a). Ask the class, "What is the student in (a) doing?" One possible answer is, "Tearing pages out of a library book." Then, ask, "What is the student in (b) doing?" One possible answer is, "Marking pages in a library book with a pen." And so on, continue until the person in (j) has been described. This gives the students practice talking about what the people are doing. Point out that these phrases are on their worksheets.

The students also need to compare pairs of actions. If the students are exceptionally advanced, this is no problem. But, if the students need some help, the phrases "X is worse than Y" and "X is not as bad as Y" are quite useful. Write these two phrases on the board, while pointing out to the students that these phrases are also on their worksheets.

Now, ask for a volunteer and tell the volunteer to compare what the student did in (a) with what the student did in (b). This should produce something like, "Tearing pages out of a library book is worse than marking pages in a library book with a pen."

Write the answer on the board. Continue until the students understand how to make such comparisons. The students are now ready for the main activity.

Make sure that the students understand the instructions. Then, begin by having the students rank the actions individually before they are divided into pairs.

## Student Worksheet

Divide the class into groups of four or five. As a group, come to an agreement and rank the people described from most moral to least moral, with number 1 being the most moral and number 10 being the least moral. Be prepared to explain your answers; when you talk with other students and with other groups, you will have to explain why your ranking is the best ranking.

### Useful phrases:

—                      commit a crime

X is worse than Y.

X is not as bad as Y.

avoiding paying for the bus  
keeping the ticket money for himself  
pretending a book is lost and paying for it  
marking a library book with a pen  
sending their grandmother to an old people's home  
sitting in a more expensive seat  
stealing canned fish for himself and his family  
stealing canned fish to sell  
tearing pages out of a library book

A student studying for a very important examination tears out a few pages from a library book. He needs them very badly and the book is rarely used by others.

Another student studying for a very important examination marks pages of a library book with a pen.

A teacher needs a special reference book for his work. Since this type of reference book is not found in the book shops, he borrows one from a library, says he has lost it and pays for it.

A young woman avoids paying her bus fare. She thinks the bus service is bad.

A young man buys a cheap ticket to the cinema and sits in a more expensive seat, since one is available.

A worker at a fish canning factory regularly smuggles out canned fish for himself and his family.

A salesgirl needs money desperately. She takes it from the shop and, unnoticed, returns it the next day.

A worker at a fish canning factory regularly smuggles out canned fish for himself and sells it.

A bus driver on a long-distance bus is paid a fare by a passenger who does not take a ticket. The driver puts the money in his pocket.

A well-off family decides to send their eighty-year-old grandmother to an old people's home.

Stage One

Each student should first rank tasks (a) through (j) individually, while thinking about what principle is involved in the ranking.

Stage Two

Students should then divide up into pairs. After comparing their rankings, each pair of students works out a single ranking between them.

Stage Three

After coming to an agreement, the pairs of students get together into fours. The groups of four then compare, discuss, and agree on a single ranking.

Stage Four

The fours then combine into eights and the process continues. And so on.

Aleksandra Golebiowska. 1990. *Getting Students To Talk* Prentice-Hall, Inc.