



“To put yourself in another’s place requires real imagination, but by doing so, each Girl Scout will be able to live among others happily.”

—Juliette Gordon Low,
founder of Girl Scouts

Finding Common Ground

Democratic governments exist to help citizens with differing opinions find common ground—the place where people’s thoughts, opinions, and beliefs intersect. Whether it’s Congress, your state, or the local town council, elected leaders often have to make trade-offs—giving up some things they favor to gain support for others. In this badge, investigate how our government does it—and how you can, too.

Steps

1. Get to know someone different from you
2. Make decisions in a group
3. Explore civil debate
4. Understand a compromise
5. Find common ground through mediation

Purpose

When I’ve earned this badge, I’ll know strategies for bringing people together to find common ground.

Every step has three choices. Do ONE choice to complete each step. Inspired? Do more!

STEP 1 Get to know someone different from you

Sometimes we make our differences so big we can't see past them. But when you get to know people who aren't exactly like you, you often find that they care about many of the same things you do and that you can find common ground—not by sacrificing or changing what you think, but by being open to other perspectives.

CHOICES - DO ONE:

Difference of background. Interview someone from another country, region, or town who lives in your community now. Ask them how they came to live in your community, what things were like for them in the place they left, and what things are like now; then share things about your life. Do you have any tips to help them feel at home?

OR

Difference of belief. Find out more about someone with beliefs different from yours. If you have a friend who practices another faith, you might go to services with her family and talk about their traditions. Or you might meet with a pastor or a youth group at a different place of worship or an interfaith alliance. You could also have a respectful discussion about politics with someone who thinks differently.

OR

Difference of opinion. Even friends have different opinions—on foods, songs, movies, books, and games, to name a few! Find a friend who loves something that's not your favorite, and vice versa. Listen to her reasons and try her favorite thing—and have her do the same for your favorite. Then share at least two things you do like about each other's favorites.



STEP 2 Make decisions in a group

For this step, do an activity with a group, such as running your Cadette meeting or spending a few hours together. The important thing is to make at least six decisions together—when, where, and what you’ll eat, how long you’ll do things, etc. Afterward, talk about the common-ground strategy. What trades did you make for the good of the group or to gain what you wanted? How do you think the strategy would work on a government level?

BEFORE YOU START, PICK A CHOICE (TOGETHER!):

- Use one of the methods from the Decision Methods sidebar. Get really familiar with one of the methods so you understand it thoroughly.
OR
- Use two of the methods. Try the two your group is most eager to use.
OR
- Try them all! Use each of the methods for different decisions throughout the activity. When you have your post-activity discussion, compare the methods. Did you have a favorite? Is everyone’s favorite method the same?

More to Explore

Opinion consensus. During your activity, try coming to consensus on something subjective—like the best women’s soccer team, the most beautiful place in your area, or the cutest puppy in a picture of a litter. What’s it like to find common ground when the “decision” is based purely on opinion?

Common Ground in Court: Hung Juries

A jury is usually made up of 6–12 people, depending on the type of case. After a jury has listened to the arguments made by both sides, they must decide on a verdict. To give an official “guilty” or “not guilty” response, the majority of jurors must agree with one another. In most criminal cases, every person on the jury has to agree—the vote must be unanimous. If a jury can’t come to an agreement, it is called a hung jury. A hung jury results in a mistrial, which means the case can be tried again with a new jury.

Decision Methods

Majority rules. Poll your group. Ask everyone in the group for her top three options. Write down the two most popular options, then take a vote. The option with the most votes wins!

Consensus or compromise. Your brother wants burgers. You want pizza. You could order a cheeseburger pizza. Or you could agree to have burgers this time if you have pizza next time. But you both like tacos. Could you have those instead? Discuss the issue until you arrive at a decision everyone can accept.

Pick at random. Have everyone write her choice on a slip of paper. Put them in a hat, and choose one at random. You could also flip a coin or draw straws.

Debate Topic Ideas

- The United States should lower the voting age
- Junk food should be banned in schools
- School should be year-round
- Peer pressure can be more beneficial than harmful
- Schools should not use standardized testing
- Television is a bad influence
- Schools should ban animal dissection
- School attendance should be voluntary
- There should be mandatory drug testing for participation in extracurricular activities

What other topics are you interested in debating?

STEP 3 Explore civil debate

A debate is a discussion between people or groups in which they express different opinions about a topic. It's important to know how to use facts and logic to support your opinions and persuade others to see things your way. In this step, consider both sides and keep an open mind—that's how common ground is found.

CHOICES - DO ONE:

- Ask an expert to teach you the techniques of debate.** This might be a local politician or a high school or college student on a debate team. Then hold a short debate on an issue you're interested in (see the sidebar for ideas). Afterward, discuss the arguments both sides made and whether you see common ground.

FOR MORE FUN: When you hold your debate, choose to argue the side you don't agree with! It might give you insight into the opinions of people who think differently than you.

OR

- Watch candidates for elected office debate.** It could be between the candidates for president, Congress, or governor from your area. Or you could attend a debate among local candidates for mayor, town council, or student council. After the debate, discuss the arguments both sides made and whether there's common ground. (You might want to look into the issues before you watch so you can understand the arguments.)

OR

- Understand a famous debate in American history.** It might be one of the debates between the suffragists and elected officials in the early 1900s, or a debate between Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. Find out why the debate proved historic and who was considered the winner, and why. What was the common ground in the opposing positions?

FOR MORE FUN: Come to your Cadette meeting ready to re-enact the debate—perhaps in costume and with snacks from the time period (you might find a great recipe while working on your New Cuisines badge!).

More to Explore

Debate for fun! Join the debate team or mock trial team at school, and share what you learn with your Girl Scout group.

STEP 4 Understand a compromise

Compromise is a settlement where both sides yield, or concede, some points to the other in order to find the common ground where their wishes intersect. Take a closer look at one of the following.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- A community compromise.** Ask a historian or an elected official to tell you about a compromise in your community. (For example, there may have been a compromise on your school's P.E. uniform requirement.) Where did the two sides stand at the beginning? Where did they end up? How did they arrive at that decision? How does this compromise affect life where you live?

FOR MORE FUN: If you had been involved, would you have made the same compromise? With your expert, brainstorm some other possible outcomes, and imagine the differences another outcome would make in your life today.

OR

- A family or friendship compromise.** Think of a situation in which you and a family member or friend had to compromise to be able to work or live together. Use that situation, or interview an older family member about a compromise that helped shape your family. If you can imagine a more positive outcome, open up the discussion, and try finding common ground.

OR

- A state or national compromise.** Speak with a history teacher, elected official, or another expert with knowledge of the government about a compromise in your state or the federal government. Where did the two sides stand at the beginning? Where did they end up? How does this compromise affect your life?

FOR MORE FUN: Write a short alternate history story based on a different compromise outcome. (An "alternate history" is a story set in a world where historic events turned out differently. For instance, a story might be about how the world would look today if slavery were still allowed, or set in a future where the Equal Rights Amendment has become part of the U.S. Constitution.)

“People talk about the middle of the road as though it were unacceptable. Actually, all human problems, excepting morals, come into the gray areas. Things are not all black and white. There have to be compromises. The middle of the road is all of the usable surface. The extremes, right and left, are in the gutters.”

—Dwight D. Eisenhower,
former U.S. president

STEP 5 Find common ground through mediation

Mediators are third parties who help people or groups in a dispute find common ground. At some schools, peers are trained to be conflict mediators for one another. Civil mediators within the U.S. court system help both sides come to an agreement without going to trial. As the final step, try being the citizen who helps others come to an agreement.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- Mediate a cookie conflict.** Here's the conflict: There are nine cookies in a variety of flavors and differing numbers of each one—and they need to be divided fairly between two people. Serve as the mediator to find a solution both sides can live with. (Before the mediation begins, give each person time to decide how they think the cookies should be divided and to come up with three reasons they believe their solution to be fair.)

Follow the six steps of a formal mediation:

1. Give your opening remarks: Review the conflict and set ground rules.
2. State the problem: Let both people state their positions.
3. Gather information: Ask open-ended questions (those without yes or no answers) to get to the heart of each person's position.
4. Summarize: Summarize the conflict, based on what you've heard.
5. Brainstorm solutions: Brainstorm all together about possible solutions.
6. Reach an agreement: Offer ideas about where you think there is common ground. If the two sides don't agree, start with step 4, and keep going until you reach an agreement.
7. Together, enjoy a yummy snack!

TIP: Make sure you have some of your favorite cookies on hand so you can truly be neutral.

OR

- Mediate with a pro.** Invite a civil mediator or a student or professor in law or conflict resolution to visit your group. Ask them to share real-life examples of civil or international mediation and to lead you in an exercise to try out some mediation skills of your own.

OR

- Suggest solutions for a current international conflict.** What are the positions on both sides? Pretend they've come to you to help them negotiate a peace treaty. (A treaty is a formal agreement between two or more states.) On your own or with friends, decide what you think is the common ground, and develop a one-page proposal for a "treaty." Share it with your history or social studies teacher.

FOR MORE FUN: Have each girl in your Cadette group develop a treaty proposal for the same conflict. How do your treaties differ? How are they the same? Where did you all see common ground?

Careers to Explore

- ◆ Judge
- ◆ Elected official
- ◆ Civil mediator
- ◆ Chief executive officer
- ◆ Ambassador
- ◆ School principal
- ◆ Teacher
- ◆ Foreign-service officer
- ◆ Elementary school teacher
- ◆ School psychologist
- ◆ Social worker
- ◆ Lawyer
- ◆ Psychiatrist
- ◆ Counselor