



Lessons On Leadership:

**Lessons from the lives of three
great leaders**

Teacher Tips

Use these three passages to generate discussion about key attributes of effective leadership. Each of the stories exemplifies a different aspect of leadership:

- Eleanor Roosevelt's story is a study in the importance of listening to other viewpoints and treating others with respect.
- Dan West's story of the founding of Heifer International illustrates vision, creative thinking, and humility, among other attributes of effective leadership.
- Abraham Lincoln and the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation shows the risk-taking and courage that leadership requires.

Before Reading- Give students the page "Leadership- What does it mean for you?" Students are asked to record what they believe leadership is. After writing their thoughts, they should record ideas that they hear from other students on their own page.

During Reading- Students annotate while reading to identify attributes and examples of effective leadership. Each passage is followed by discussion questions for students. These questions are designed to allow students to reflect on these examples of leadership, identify key attributes, and explore how they relate to us today. Three suggested activities are found below to conduct class discussions that promote active engagement by all students (Quick Write, Talking Chips and Fishbowl).

After Reading- At the conclusion of reading and discussing the three passages, students complete the "Reflections on Leadership." They complete the graphic organizer identifying key attributes of leadership from each of the biographical sketches. Finally, they write a one paragraph description of what leadership is to them. After students have completed their description, ask them to reflect on how their description has evolved from the one they wrote at the beginning of the unit.

Quick Write

Objective: This activity promotes individual reflection and active engagement by having all students quickly write their reflections and reactions. The focus is on the generation and expression of ideas, not the structure, grammar, conventions, etc. of writing.

How:

1. Give students a specific question to respond to, or ask them to respond generally to the passage they just read.
2. Give students a short amount of time to generate a quick write. Typically this is 2-3 minutes.
3. Explain to students that they are expected to generate a response and that they are not to worry about conventions for this exercise. The expectation is that they get as many

thoughts as possible out on the paper, so their pen should be moving during the entire time.

4. Have students quickly debrief on what they think and what they have written through a partner share. Or, use this to prepare students for a class discussion (see the next two activities)

Talking Chips Discussion

Objective: This discussion activity promotes active listening and speaking by all participants in a group.

How:

1. Give students a question to discuss. Ask students to prepare for a class discussion by giving them some “think time”, or having students first do a quick write (see above).
2. Students get into small groups of 4-6 participants. Each student has a “chip”, some sort of token that represents them. This may be a pen or pencil, or another small item.
3. When students want to talk, they place their “chip” into the center of the group. When the next person wants to talk, they place their “chip” into the center. When all students have commented and put their chips into the middle, all students retrieve their chips and begin again, continuing their conversation. No one may make additional comments once their chip is in the middle.

Fishbowl Discussion

Objective: This activity is intended to allow students a forum to express their thoughts and opinions in an interactive way.

How:

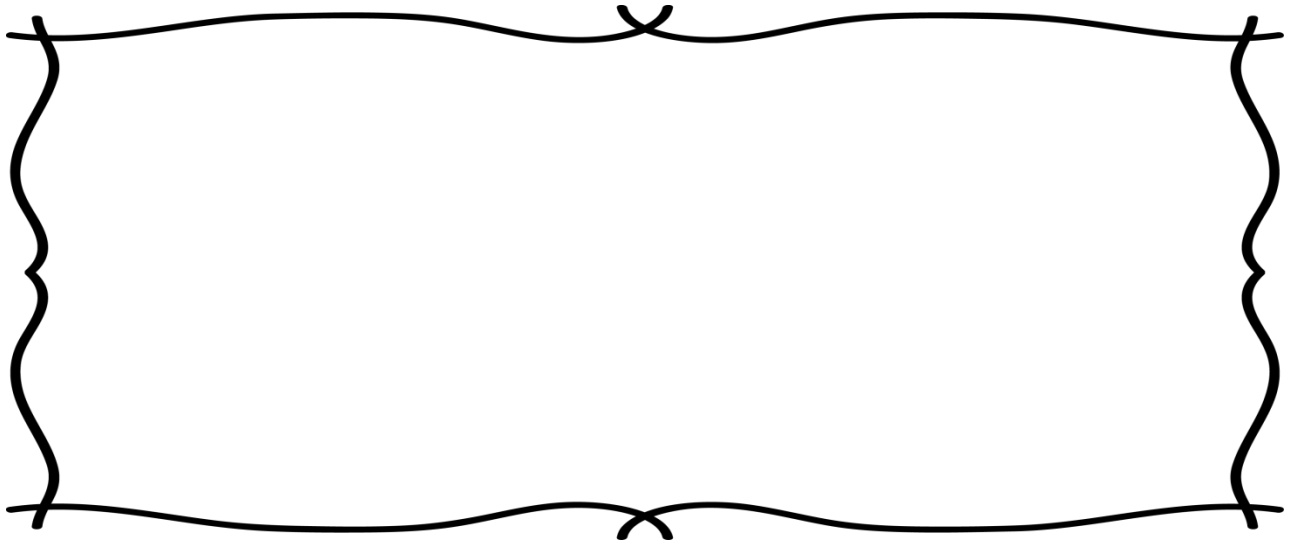
- 1.) Introduce the discussion question. Allow students a minute to think about the topic before beginning the discussion, or use the quick write activity above.
- 2.) Arrange the chairs in such a way so that there are 4-5 in a circle facing each other, and enough chairs for the remaining students in a circle around the small circle. When you have one small circle surrounded by a larger circle explain that the only people who will be speaking on the topic are those who are seated in the small circle. When students wish to join the discussion, they may tap the shoulder of someone in the small circle and change places with them. All students should plan to be in the small circle at least once during the discussion.
- 3.) Select 4 students to begin in the middle and kick off the discussion. Moderate as the discussion goes along, reminding students as necessary to switch into the small group as they are ready to join the discussion. If conversation lags, ask a follow up question or give an additional prompt.

- 4.) Give students notice when only two minutes remain. Then, end the fishbowl and return chairs to their original places.
- 5.) Have students write a quick reflection about the discussion and turn it in. Choose a question to guide their reflection. Some examples of questions they can respond to are: what was an interesting point you heard? What is a comment you don't agree with from the discussion today? What has changed in your thinking after this discussion? What did you learn? How important do you think this topic is?

Leadership-

What does it mean to you?

Brainstorm: What does the term “leadership” mean to you? In what ways can a person be a leader? What are attributes of a good leader?



Discussion: Jot three more ideas you hear from others during class discussion:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Next Steps: You will read the stories of three examples of leadership in action. While reading, reflect on what the word leadership means, and think about what you would add or refine in your current definition of leadership.

Eleanor Roosevelt

In 1932 the United States of America was in the depths of an economic depression. Unemployment soared to record heights, family's had lost their life saving overnight, and a malaise extended throughout the country. Previously successful businessmen were reduced to waiting in line at soup kitchens for their next meal. Frustrated and feeling forgotten, seventeen thousand World War I veterans and their families travelled to Washington D.C. to demand compensation they believed they were entitled to from their service during the war. As Brad Melzer wrote, "President Hoover sent General Douglas MacArthur and troops armed with fixed bayonets to meet the veterans with force. With tanks. With tear gas." The veterans were evicted from the parks they were camping in. Shots were fired and fifty-five veterans were injured and 135 were arrested.



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The next year, these veterans returned to Washington D.C. to protest again. But this time Franklin D. Roosevelt was the president. He took a different approach. He provided the marchers with a campsite and three meals a day. Rather than sending the Army, he instead sent his wife, the remarkable Eleanor Roosevelt:

In mud and rain, she walked among the veterans. She talked to them like people. She listened. Soon after, an executive order was issued that created twenty-five thousand jobs for veterans through the Civilian Conservation Corps and eventually led to the 1944 passage of the GI Bill of Rights, which gave veterans federal assistance in returning to civilian life.

Eleanor Roosevelt's work with the protesting veterans led to dramatically different outcomes than the prior approach. She listened to their stories, reminisced about the sacrifices of war, and told them she understood their frustrations. Her meeting with the veterans reduced the tensions of a difficult situation and set the stage for future resolutions of the very issues they were protesting.

Eleanor Roosevelt

Discussion Questions

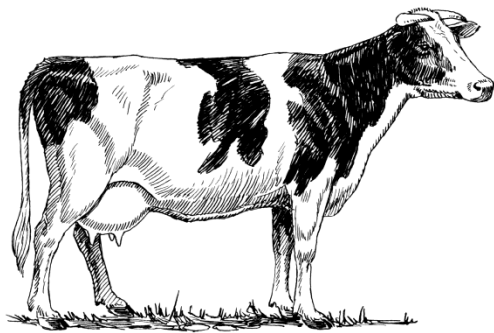
- What does Eleanor Roosevelt's example here teach us about leadership?
- Which leadership style was more effective in addressing this difficult and emotional situation? Explain why you think that is.
- How does this experience relate to us today? What should we learn from this situation?
- How do you imagine you would have felt if you were a protesting veteran in this story? What would you have thought of Eleanor Roosevelt's approach?

Dan West

Dan West wasn't planning on leading an international relief organization. He was a farmer from Indiana, volunteering with the relief efforts for those affected by the Spanish Civil War in 1939. As he handed out cups of powdered milk to hungry orphans and war refugees day after day it hit him: "These children don't need a cup, they need a cow."

West returned home and formed Heifers for Relief. His plan was to help communities end hunger by providing livestock and training so people could feed themselves and their families. One key component of this program would be that those who received a cow, pig, or other animal would learn to care for them and then would give one of the offspring to another family in need, making it a gift that would keep on giving.

In 1944 he arranged the first shipment. Seventeen cows were sent from Pennsylvania to Puerto Rico, "going to families whose malnourished children had never even tasted milk." The project continued to grow, distributing thousands of cows in countries throughout Europe to



[By Pearson Scott Foresman \[Public domain\], via Wikimedia](#)

communities devastated by World War II. In 1953 the charity became Heifer International, and since that time it has expanded and grown. Today the organization works in 128 countries to help families overcome poverty and then pass on their gift to other families. Since Dan West's first shipment of seventeen cows, his organization has helped 7 million families (38 million people) in 125 countries become more self-reliant for food and income.

Dan West exemplified some of the best traits of leadership. He had a vision of something he wanted to accomplish and change, and he rallied people behind that vision. He was able to create an international organization by marshalling the knowledge and abilities of others, and focusing them toward accomplishing the mission they had set for the organization. But perhaps most importantly, he actively listened and sought ways to respond to the needs of others. When he saw the desperate faces of orphans and refugees of the Spanish Civil War, he conceived of a way to provide lasting, rather than temporary, relief for those in need. As Heifer International extended into new regions of the world, he adapted the training and even the animals to meet the needs of people; today Heifer International provides more than 25 types of animals, including goats, bees, silkworms, and buffaloes. And he retained his humility- he didn't need to be the guy with all the answers. As Dan West said, "In all my travels around the world, the important decisions were made where people sat in a circle, facing each other as equals."

Dan West

Discussion Questions

- What does this story illustrate about leadership?
- How did a farmer from Indiana extend his influence to help people across the globe?
- What implications does Dan West's story have for us?
- What do you think Dan West meant when he said: "In all my travels around the world, the important decisions were made where people sat in a circle, facing each other as equals."

Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln led the nation during the most difficult time in our history, the Civil War. With his election and before he even took office, seven southern slave states seceded from the nation. In April, shots were fired and he called troops into action to “preserve the Union.” He became the Commander in Chief of a country divided, one where brother fought against brother. As historians reflect on the leadership he provided from March 1861 to April 1865, they consistently rank him as one of the all-time greatest U.S. presidents.

One example of Lincoln as a leader is the famous story of his decision to issue the *Emancipation Proclamation*. He met with his Cabinet and asked them to vote on whether or not he should issue the *Emancipation Proclamation* which would effectively end slavery in the United States. The country was already deep into the war and some were criticizing him for considering such a drastic change, while others complained that he was taking too long to make such a decision. There were constitutional, legal, and moral concerns on both sides of the issue.

The story is told that when he brought in the *Emancipation Proclamation* as a completed document, President Lincoln polled his Cabinet, asking his team of advisors whether or not he should now issue this official proclamation to the country. The Secretary of State stood and uttered his ‘*Nay*’ unmistakably. The Secretary of the Interior followed suit. The Treasury Secretary and so forth: all against. Lincoln heard them each in turn. Then Lincoln raised his hand and said... ‘The eyes have it.’”

As he signed the Proclamation Lincoln commented, “I never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right, than I do in signing this paper.”



[Francis Bicknell Carpenter \[Public domain\], via Wikimedia Commons](#)

Abraham Lincoln

Discussion Questions:

- What does this story illustrate about leadership?
- What was the impact of Lincoln's decision to issue the Emancipation Proclamation? Who did this decision impact?
- What do you think about Lincoln's statement "the ayes have it"? What should we learn from this?
- Issuing the Emancipation Proclamation when he did was a risk. President Lincoln risked further alienating a group of people whose reaction was hard to predict. This was a controversial decision even among some in the Northern Free States, and it was an unimaginable decision for many in the South. At the same time, others felt that he had waited far too long. What does this suggest to us about leaders and risk? How much risk do you think a leader should take? In what circumstances?

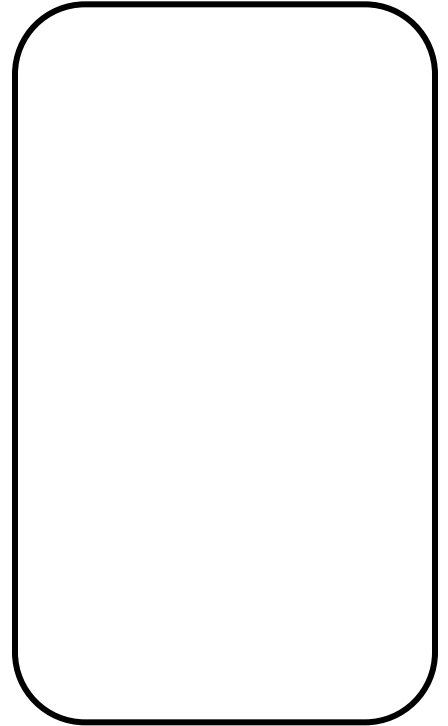
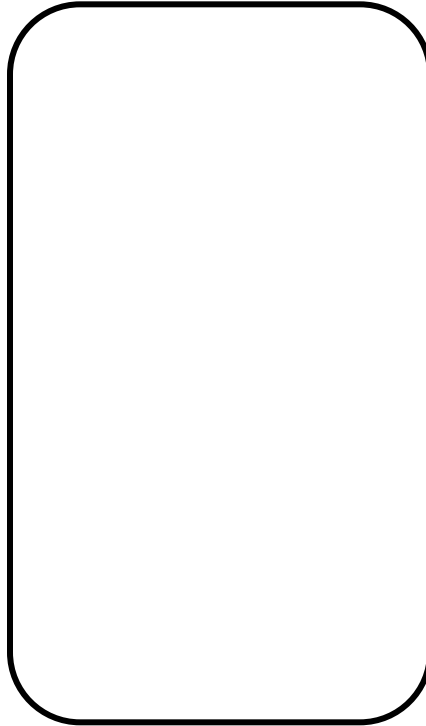
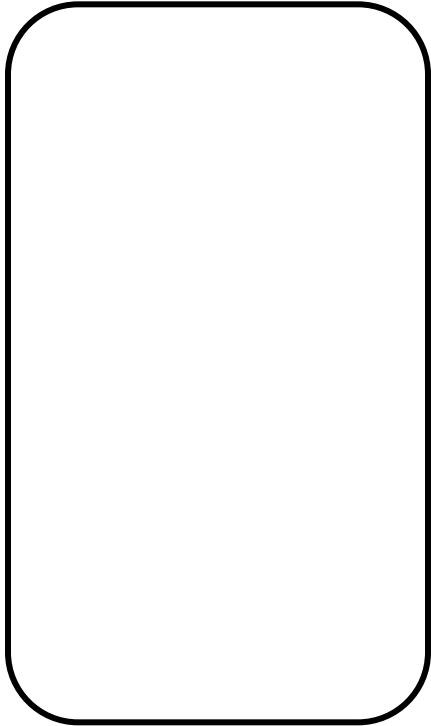
Reflections on Leadership

Record key characteristics of effective leadership from the stories of Eleanor Roosevelt, Dan West, and Abraham Lincoln:

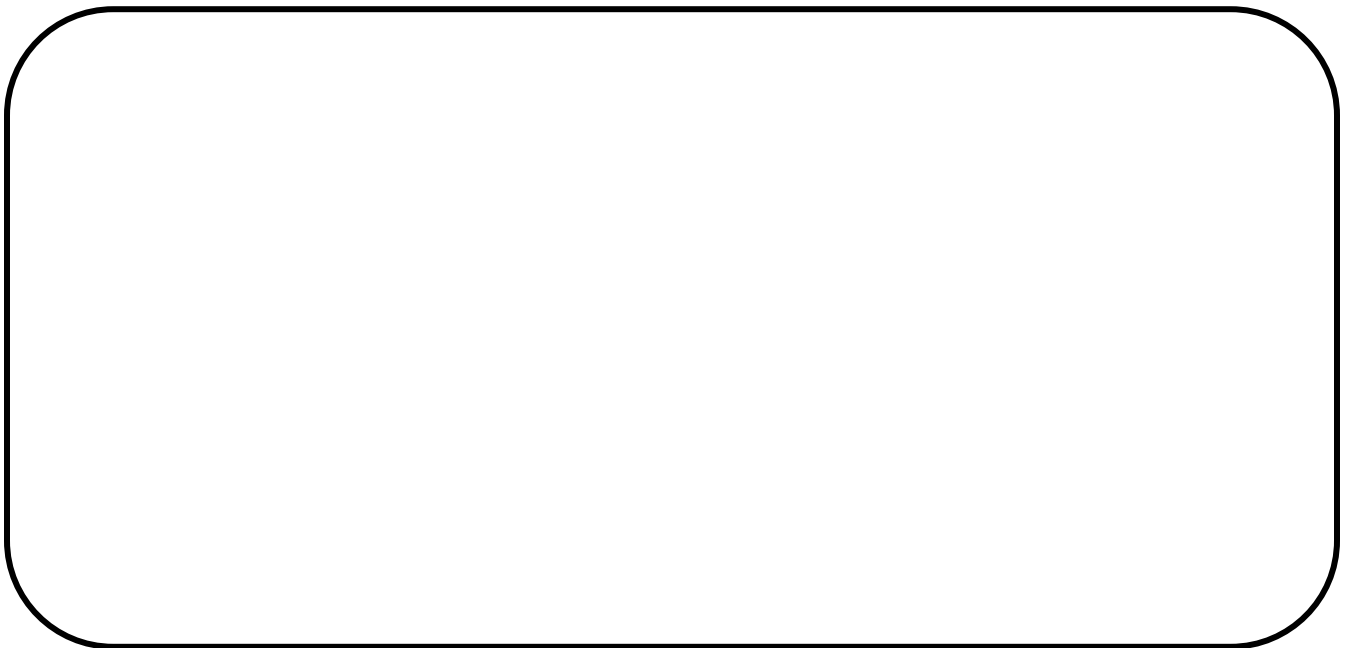
Eleanor Roosevelt

Dan West

Abraham Lincoln



Write a paragraph describing what the term “leadership” means to you? In what ways can a person be a leader? What are attributes of a good leader?



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