

The Emperor's New Clothes and Independent Thought

The purpose of this remote lesson is to make students aware of the effects of peer pressure and the human inclination towards conformity in evaluating information and reaching conclusions.

Begin by having students watch the video “The Emperor’s New Clothes and Independent Thought.”

Instruct students to take the accompanying quiz. They can retake the quiz until they score at least 80%.

CRITICAL THINKING AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Have you ever been influenced to change your opinions in order to “fit in” or to feel accepted by others? Have you ever seen this happen to someone else?

Can you think of other examples of this effect in society or in your school?

Why do you think we have private voting in the USA? What might happen if people’s individual votes were made public information?

The experimenter Solomon Asch found that up to 75% of his test subjects could be swayed in their responses by the pressure to conform. What do you think makes the 25%, who couldn’t be swayed, different from the others? What kind of traits are required to stand firm when a person is in the minority like that?

Who is John Stuart Mill? What has he written?

[Here](#) is a good, illustrated summary of one of his most famous works: “On Liberty”
You can watch a video of it [here](#).

Here are videos of the original Asch conformity experiments:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyDDyT1lDhA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYIh4MkcfJA&t=70s>

Why do you think that the First Amendment protects citizens’ “Freedom of speech?” What could happen without this protection?

The Emperor’s video claims that “democracy needs its truth-tellers.” Do you agree? Why would truth-telling be important in a democracy?



Why is asking unpopular or uncomfortable questions important in journalism or in science? What could happen if journalists or scientists only said what was popular?

Devil's advocate - Does a lawyer ever have to take an unpopular stance?

Here are words and phrases to look up, discuss, and define:

- Peer pressure
- Tyranny of the majority
- "Groupthink"
- Dissent
- Blind spot
- Devil's advocate

SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENT:

Have you read any of Shakespeare's plays that incorporate a "Fool" or a "Jester?" Which ones? Look up some of the lines spoken by one of Shakespeare's Jester characters and see if it contains hidden wisdom.

