



Teaching Strategy

“Meet or Eat?” Competition vs. Collaboration

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Update on Law-Related Education, 20.2, 1996, pp. 17–21. American Bar Association.

Background

Negotiation is any form of communication aimed at achieving a goal. Thus, almost any interpersonal encounter involves negotiation.

Game theorists study negotiation and decision making by analyzing games and their relationships to real-life situations. This lesson presents a card game called “Meet or Eat?” based on what game theorists refer to as a Prisoner’s Dilemma. “Meet or Eat?” presents students with a choice between collaboration and self-serving defection, bringing to bear issues of competition versus collaboration, working relationships, and trust. In this two-person game, if both players resist the temptation to violate trust, they score higher in the long run. Players who violate trust damage relationships and learn how costly the long-term consequences of doing so can be.

In negotiation, clear communication is essential. In “Meet or Eat?” the

Jared R. Curhan is founder and executive director of the Program for Young Negotiators, a national non-profit program dedicated to making adult negotiation concepts applicable to and enjoyable for young people. Adapted from the Program for Young Negotiators Teachers Manual (Cambridge, Massachusetts © 1996). Special thanks to Sara Trenary for assisting in the development of the “Meet or Eat?” game. Illustrations by Deborah Katzenellenbogen.

only type of communication permitted is nonverbal. Students will quickly learn that reduced communication can cause serious problems.

This lesson is intended to show students why, even if your goal is to be totally out for yourself, you will almost always be better off if you understand and address the concerns of those around you.

Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will

- Realize the power of collaboration—even if it arises from a purely self-centered perspective
- Learn, by experience, how challenging it can be to build and sustain a working relationship
- Understand the delicate but valuable properties of trust

Target Group: Grades 6–12

Time Needed: 2–3 class periods

Materials Needed: Student Handouts 1–4

Procedures

1. Pair all students and seat them facing their partners.
2. Distribute Handouts 1, 2, and 3 to students. Have them cut out the two cards (a Rabbit Card and a Cobra Card) on Handout 1.
3. Explain the rules of the game.
 - a. The object of the game is to *win as many points as you can*. Here, the word *you* is intended to be singular—not referring to the sum of the two players’ scores.

- b. In each round, players have a chance to win points by choosing which of their two cards to play for that round. After each round, players are instructed to look up their scores on the Scoring Key (Handout 2), record their scores on the Score Sheet (Handout 3), and then pick up their cards again to prepare for the next round.

- c. Between rounds, players should hold their cards up close so that others may not see them.

- d. The game lasts ten rounds and there is **NO TALKING** allowed whatsoever—anyone who speaks during the game is to be disqualified.

4. Teach students how the Scoring Key works. Point to the visual combinations on the Scoring Key as you describe the scoring logic to the class:
 - a. If **TWO RABBITS** are played, the rabbits meet and “hang out” together, so players get 2 points each.

- b. If **A COBRA AND A RABBIT** are played, the cobra eats the rabbit, so the person who played the cobra gets 3 points and the person who played the rabbit gets zero points.

- c. If **TWO COBRAS** are played, the cobras attack each other, so players get 1 point each.

5. You may want to play 1 or 2 practice rounds and explain what happens.

6. Let the games begin! After ten minutes, or alternatively when all pairs have completed ten rounds, instruct students to total their personal scores.

7. Have each student report his or her results. As students call out their

scores, write their point totals on the board. List the results of each pair of students by writing the two scores side by side (e.g., 16/19). Note that possible individual scores range from 0–30. Games in which only rabbits are played by both players end in a final score of 20/20.

8. Survey your higher- and lower-scoring students to determine the nature of their games. Results will almost always demonstrate that those players who managed to maintain a long series of rabbit-rabbit meetings scored higher than those who repeatedly attempted surprise cobras.

9. Provided that both players fully understand the scoring implications of “Meet or Eat?” playing cobras should be beneficial for the cobra player in the short term, but dangerous for the

long-term relationship between the players. For example, a series of rabbit-rabbit meetings followed by one player choosing a cobra could result in a breakdown of trust. Once trust is broken, it may take several rounds before angry cobra-cobra meetings can be replaced by amicable rabbit-rabbit meetings. These cobra-cobra rounds bring down both players’ final scores. Furthermore, if a student develops a reputation for being a cobra player, anyone playing with that student in the future might defensively play cobras, again resulting in a low-scoring game for both players. A class discussion about long-term relationship issues may be helpful, depending upon the level of comprehension and sophistication of the students. If time permits, distribute Handout 4 and use

the Strategy Questions as part of the class discussion.

10. Optional variation on the rules: Choose a particular point in the game to allow 1–2 minutes of talking between partners. Afterward, continue with the NO-TALKING rule as before. This brief period of communication allows students to negotiate terms for future play—although the degree to which these terms are followed may vary significantly!

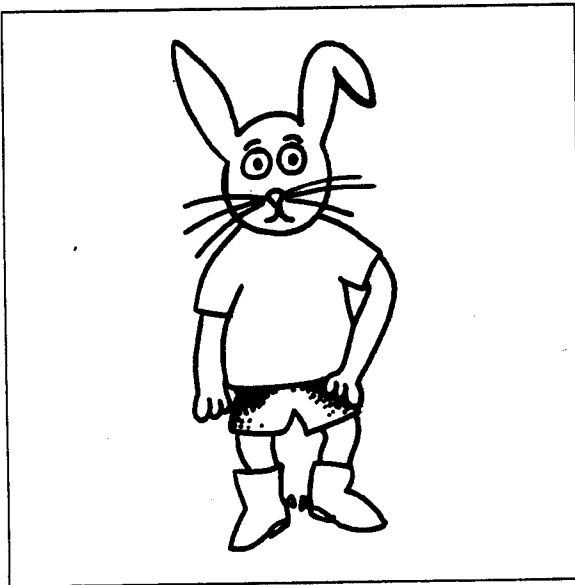
For additional reading on Prisoner’s Dilemma Games, see Robert Axelrod’s *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

Student Handout 1

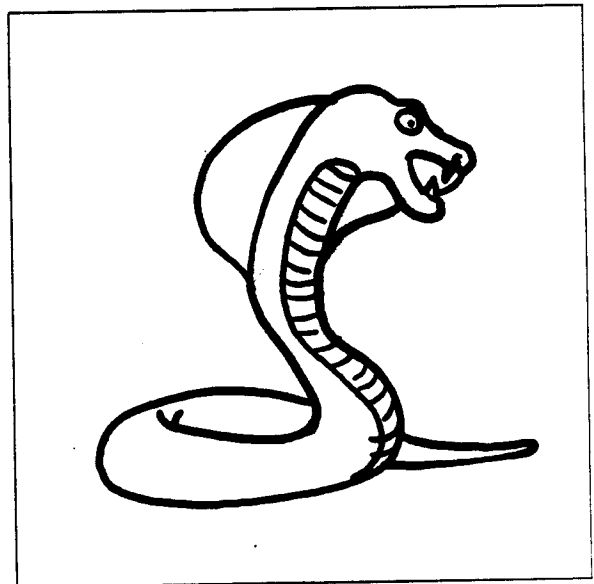
Game Cards

Cut out the cards.

Rabbit Card



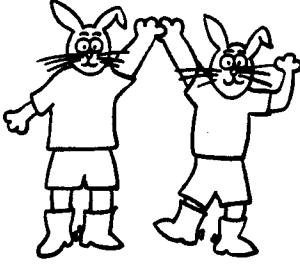

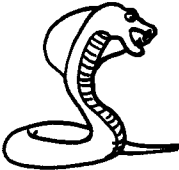
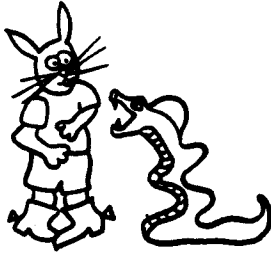
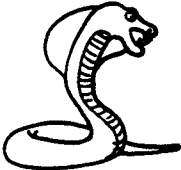

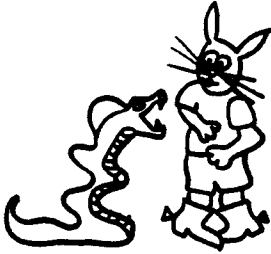
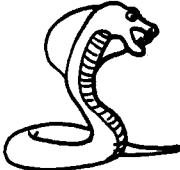




Cobra Card



Student Handout 2









































Meet or Eat? Scoring Key

If I choose	... and you choose		... then I GET	... and YOU GET
			2	2
			0	3
			3	0
			1	1

Student Handout 3

Meet or Eat? Score Sheet

My Name: _____ **My Partner's Name:** _____

ROUND 1	I chose  	and	my partner chose  	My score was
ROUND 2	I chose  	and	my partner chose  	My score was
ROUND 3	I chose  	and	my partner chose  	My score was
ROUND 4	I chose  	and	my partner chose  	My score was
ROUND 5	I chose  	and	my partner chose  	My score was
ROUND 6	I chose  	and	my partner chose  	My score was
ROUND 7	I chose  	and	my partner chose  	My score was
ROUND 8	I chose  	and	my partner chose  	My score was
ROUND 9	I chose  	and	my partner chose  	My score was
ROUND 10	I chose  	and	my partner chose  	My score was
My Total Score Was				

Student Handout 4

Strategy Questions

Think about the following hypothetical situations:

What would you do next? Why?

[R = Rabbit; C = Cobra; ? = The move in question]

1. What should you do on your first move of the game?

You	?						
Your Partner							

2. How should you respond to surprise cobras?

You	R	R	R	?	?		
Your Partner	R	R	C				

3. How should you respond to repeated cobras?

You	R	R	R	R	?		
Your Partner	C	C	C	C			

4. What should you do on your last move of the game?

You	R	R	R	R	R	R	?
Your Partner	R	R	R	R	R	R	

End
of
game.