



John Rawls' "Justice As Fairness": Lesson Plan

Topic	
<p>John Rawls' defines justice as being fundamentally fair. For a system to be fair, it needs to try to find objective truth from competing claims and equally listen to all sides. His essay, "Justice As Fairness" is most famous for the liberty principle (all persons have the greatest liberty they can possibly have without infringing upon anyone's own liberty), the fair equality of opportunity (any position or office is open to any individual provided they can prove their merit in fair competition), and the difference principle (any deviation from equality should benefit the least-advantaged individual).</p>	
Possible subjects/classes	Time needed
Philosophy, Ethics, Religion, Sociology, Government, Politics, Law	30-45 minutes
Video link:	
https://academy4sc.org/topic/john-rawls-justice-as-fairness-liberty-rarely-differs-among-equals-moral-and-ethical-philosophy-series-academy-4-social-change/	
Objective: <i>What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?</i>	
<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how fairness relates to justice. • List the two main principles of Rawls' argument. • Explain the importance of justice. 	
Key Concepts & Vocabulary	
Institutional vs. Individual level, Utilitarian	
Materials Needed	
Worksheet, Student internet access (optional research activity)	
Before you watch	



Quick write: Define justice in your own words.

While you watch

1. According to Rawls, what is justice fundamentally linked to?
2. What does the second principle reveal about inequalities?
3. What should always be the case when exceptions to the fair equality of opportunity are tolerated?

After you watch/discussion questions

1. How does justice play a role in your daily life?
2. What makes a deal or decision fair?
3. What do you think is the most important part of Rawls' argument? Why?
4. Do you think Rawls' definition of justice is satisfactory? If you find it lacking, how would you improve it?

Activity Ideas

- Work together in groups and research local, state, or federal court cases. Assess their outcome according to the liberty principle, the fair equality of opportunity, and/or the difference principle.
- Get into groups and critique Rawls' findings. Are they persuasive? Why? How could his essay be improved? Is there anything important he doesn't discuss that should be addressed? Debrief as a class and review your discoveries.
- Write a short reflection on what principle you find most important for an institution and why. Your write-up should be one to three paragraphs long.
- Individually complete the Worksheet. Then review answers as a class.

Sources/places to learn more

1. Rawls, John. "Justice as Fairness." *Journal of Philosophy*, vol 54, no 22, Dec 1957, pp 653-662.
2. Rawls, John. "Justice as Fairness." *The Philosophical Review*, vol 67, no 2, April 1958, pp 164-194.
3. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. "John Rawls." The Metaphysics Research Lab, Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University, Jan 2017, ISN: 1095-5054.