

**Lesson title:** Defining Terms

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**Summary:** In this classroom lesson, students work together to define key international studies terms in their own words. This can be used repeatedly for many different classes.

**Objectives:**

1. Critical thinking: Students will be able to critically analyze academic texts, international news, maps, histories, and their own received ideologies and received wisdom for assumptions, political and cultural points of view, and stated and unstated biases.
2. Representation: Students develop a recognition that all acts of representation are always partial—that they are shaped by the questions asked and the perspectives of those creating the representation. Therefore, students will be more critical consumers of such representations in the future.

**Learning Outcomes:**

- Students begin by trying to define an international studies term for themselves.
- Students discuss or debate the accuracy of one another's definitions in groups.
- Students perceive differences in other group member's working definitions of terms. They also perceive how collaboration and conversation may possibly lead to consensus, but more importantly, they lead to new knowledge.

**Materials Required:** none.

**Lesson Activities:**

1. Start by asking students to take out a sheet of paper. Ask them to try to define the terms you offer—"democracy," for example, or "terrorism." Have them write for 3-5 minutes.
2. Ask students to get into pairs, or small groups, and exchange thoughts. (Tell them they can read what they wrote out loud, or summarize, it doesn't matter.) Ask each group to attempt to create a collaborative definition—one that all group members can agree on. Request that someone keep track of the salient points of the group's discussion. Allow 5-10 minutes for discussion.
3. Ask groups to choose a representative to report back to the class.
4. Ask group representatives to read the new, collaborative definitions aloud, and explain the choices made by the group.
5. Discuss differing definitions as a class. Which one did the class think offered the best explanation of the concept? Which was the most interesting?

**Assessment:** none.

**Comments:**

Allowing students time to “surface” or discuss up front their received knowledge in the form of their working definitions of important terms gives them an entry point into later, more sophisticated discussions.

Some key terms that might be used for this exercise include:

**Chapter One:** Power, Political, Liberal

**Chapter Two:** History, Story, Truth

**Chapter Three:** Environment,  
Geography, Place

**Chapter Four:** Development,  
Economic, Globalization

**Chapter Five:** Common Sense,  
Communication, Culture

**Chapter Six:** Democracy, Nationalism,  
Progress

**Chapter Seven:** Development,  
Prosperity, Secularism

**Chapter Eight:** Dependency,  
Colonialism, Socialism,

**Chapter Nine:** Colonialism, Islamic,  
Zionism

**Chapter Ten:** Apartheid, Colonialism,  
Refugee