

CRITICAL THINKING & PROBLEM SOLVING

Teacher Resource

WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING & PROBLEM SOLVING?

Gathering information to think through and determine the best solution.

BENCHMARKS

- ✓ **HE.68.R.4.2** Develop and apply conflict resolution skills in a variety of situations. Clarification: Coping, grit and new learning opportunities.
- ✓ **HE.68.R.4.3** Analyze ways to pursue common goals as a part of a team or group. Clarification: Negotiation, give and take, and analyze pros and cons.
- ✓ **HE.68.R.4.4** Identify the importance of perseverance when facing difficulty **solving a problem**.

PURPOSE

- ▶ These interactive activities will help your students explore the characteristics of **critical thinking and problem solving** and how to gather information to think through and determine the best solution to a problem. Share the suggested introduction with your students, choose one or more of the activities below, and conclude with the suggested wrap-up. Feel free to modify or revisit activities throughout the week to continue reinforcing **critical thinking and problem solving**.



Suggested Introduction:

“You are familiar with **critical thinking and problem solving**. **Critical thinking** involves analyzing information, asking thoughtful questions and understanding things deeply instead of just memorizing facts. **Problem solving** is about coming up with creative and effective solutions when faced with challenges. Together, these skills help you make better decisions, think independently and tackle problems with confidence. Today, we are going to use these skills to explore conflict resolution in a variety of situations.”



Activities to Build Critical Thinking and Problem Solving:

1 Resiliency Reading Connection

Share the story *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom from the Resiliency Reading List. This is an incredible story of perseverance and resiliency that highlights **critical thinking and problem solving**. Have students summarize the challenges Corrie ten Boom faced and how she used these skills to demonstrate resiliency. Visit **buildresiliency.org** to learn about other books listed on the Resiliency Reading List; each title has a corresponding Family Reading Guide.

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GRADES
6–8



Activities to Build Critical Thinking and Problem Solving (Continued):

2 Pathway to Progress

Create in-class challenges where students must work in teams to solve a series of puzzles or challenges in order to progress to the next station or challenge. Teachers can tailor the challenges to fit their content area. Encourage students to practice compromise, actively listen and engage in teamwork to resolve disagreements. After the challenge, hold a debrief session where students can reflect on how they resolved conflicts and worked toward a common goal. Emphasize the importance of perseverance when faced with challenges.

Example challenges include:

- Math problem – solve an equation to reveal jumbled letters
- Word scramble – unscramble letters to find a key word
- Logic puzzle – solve a riddle that leads to a Resiliency Characteristic (e.g., perseverance, empathy, mentorship)

3 The Case of the Crowded Cafeteria

Have students practice **critical thinking and problem solving** through collaboration and communication by analyzing a school-based scenario and working toward a practical compromise, using facts and respectful discussion. Present students with the scenario: “Your school has recently grown in size, and now the cafeteria is overcrowded. Some students don’t have enough time to eat, while others have to sit on the floor or skip lunch altogether. The principal is asking for student input on how to improve the lunch experience without adding a new cafeteria.” Assign students different roles or perspectives to represent (e.g., teachers, cafeteria staff, custodians, students with food allergies, administrators). Students will discuss in small groups the problems at hand, opinions vs. facts in their assigned roles and work together to propose a realistic compromise that balances the needs of different roles.

Example solutions include:

- Adding an extra lunch period
- Opening outdoor seating
- Offering grab-and-go lunch options
- Reworking class schedules



Suggested Wrap-Up:

“Today, we have explored **critical thinking and problem solving**. These are powerful tools that work best when paired with perseverance. When challenges feel frustrating or overwhelming, sticking with them and not giving up is key to finding the best solutions. When this is combined with careful thinking, creative **problem solving** and the determination to keep going, you can overcome almost any obstacle and grow stronger with each challenge you face!”