

Wicked Case Teaching Notes for Goodbye Honey Buckets

This case has been adapted. In 2002 the author shared "Goodbye Honey Buckets" as an early attempt to integrate social justice and scientific issues in a case study. It was approved for publication and educational use by the Tribal Council in the area where the author taught. While Icy Valley and John Kepaaq are fictional, the problem of plumbing in rural Alaska is real and remains today.

A wicked problem has no single, obvious or simple solution. Multiple solutions that fit local specifics are often needed. These kinds of problems usually involve multiple stakeholders who not only have different goals, but may also come from different cultures, countries or other groups. The case Goodbye Honey Buckets includes Native American and Native Alaskan people, outsider infrastructure developers and ultimately federal government and funds.

Begin by having some students come forward to read the case out loud while the others read along. Then begin the Case Analysis sheet. Ask the whole group "What is this case about?" This begins to define the issues in the case. Take 5-7 answers and write them on the board, a sheet of paper or record them electronically.

Then have students individually write down one thing they already know related to the case, and one thing they have a question about. Tell them that questions such as "What did they decide in Icy Valley" are not helpful as there are no further case details.

Next have students form groups of 3-6 and share their responses for 5-7 minutes. Each group needs to identify a person to record the comments and questions of the group. Member of the group may answer questions asked by other people in their group. At the end of the group discussion, ask each group to come to consensus on the most important thing they already knew as well as the question they think is most important.

Debrief the small groups by asking several groups to share the most important thing they knew and the most important question they had. Elicit only one of each per group. Have these written and recorded.

It is important to plan extra time during the small group case discussion and the whole group debriefing of the Case Analysis Sheet.

Expect a wide variety of responses to a case involving a wicked problem. Expect also that some people may express strong emotions as they respond to these cases.

In order to make a safe learning environment, consider in advance ways to manage discussion and to prepare your students for these discussions. For example, students need to have their concerns acknowledged by the case facilitator in a respectful manner. These concerns may be about the case itself as well as about the issues related to the case. Further, students need to speak with each other respectfully and really try to hear what is being said.

Important, controversial and/or troubling social justice issues may stir up strong emotional responses. Push forward. If you make a misstep in working with students on these kinds of cases, please know you are not alone. It may feel as though you have made a fatal mistake. But by acknowledging your unintentional misstep with your students, you can transform this into a teaching moment. Use the experience to build shared understanding of the difficulties of working on wicked problems.