

Introducing Stasis Theory: Finding Common Ground and Asking the Right Questions

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MINI-MODULE: STUDENT VERSION

Module Text

Edlund, John R. "Stasis Theory: Finding Common Ground and Asking the Right Questions." 2018.

Reading Rhetorically

Preparing to Read

Activity 1: Exploring Key Concepts

Read the following scenario and dialogue.

Four college students, Jinny, Samantha, Erin, and Merriweather, are sharing an apartment. They have to pay rent, electricity, water, and Wi-Fi every month and they have agreed to buy food in bulk from a warehouse store. Rent is \$500 per person per month and the rest totals to about \$300 apiece, also per month. They are having a discussion of their finances.

J: OK guys, I need to pay the rent in two days.

S: I just gave you money last week!

J: That was three weeks ago and it was for last month.

S: The rent's too expensive.

J: We still have to pay it. There weren't any cheaper places.

E: (Opening the pantry) Who bought all the whole wheat spaghetti? Yuck!

M: It was on sale and it is better for you.

E: Yuck!

S: I don't have any money. I am not getting many hours at the library.

E: But you just bought new jeans and that lacy top!

S: I didn't have anything to wear!

M: (Looking in the cupboard) The popcorn maker's broken. I'm hungry!

J: Guys, we have to pay the rent. And the electric bill, which is big because Merri kept turning on the heater. We agreed to split it equally.

M: It has been really cold!

E: I don't have money either. I lost my job.

S: Probably because you oversleep all the time!

E: I do not! I called in sick a few times when I had to study for a test and they didn't like it.

M: The Wi-Fi is really slow too. We should complain that we aren't getting the speed that we pay for.

J: Since no one has any money, we might have to cut the Wi-Fi. You can go to the coffee shop down the street.

E: No! We have to have Wi-Fi! I need my shows!

S: (Opening the freezer) I bought a pint of ice cream. Who ate it all?

J: I only ate a little bit.

S: Oh yeah? Well, who ate the rest?

E: Not me.

M: Not me. Didn't I see you eating it last night?

J: Enough about ice cream! If we don't pay the rent, we will all get kicked out!

These roommates have lots of issues, but what is the key issue that they are trying to discuss? Are they having a productive discussion? Why or why not? How could they do better? Do they have any common ground? Write down a list of ideas. Share your list with a partner. Then discuss what you would do or say if you were a member of that household.

Larger Question: Do politicians and other kinds of decision makers sometimes engage in the same sorts of strategies or have the same sorts of problems as these roommates? Discuss some examples.

Text – Edlund, “Stasis Theory: Finding Common Ground and Asking the Right Questions”

Reading Purposefully

Activity 2: Reading for Understanding

Read “Stasis Theory: Finding Common Ground and Asking the Right Questions.” As you read, think of the question, “How can I use this?”

Questioning the Text

Activity 3: Summarizing and Responding

Write down the key terms of forensic stasis theory, as explained in the article. These terms will be applicable to lots of situations you read about in the news. Try to memorize the four terms that lead to the four stasis questions.

Find a partner and test your memorization.

Activity 4: Thinking Critically – Deliberative Questions

Let's go back to the four college students who need to pay the rent. They are trying to solve a problem rather than evaluate a past act (though the question of "Who ate the ice cream?" would be such a question) so the deliberative questions are more appropriate. It turns out that Samantha can come up with only half of her \$500, but Erin doesn't have any money at all. Jinny and Merriweather can both pay the full amount. Samantha suggests that Jinny, who has a waitressing job and gets good tips, pay the difference and that the two who can't pay the full amount will pay her back later, perhaps by getting money from their parents. Let's answer the deliberative questions and see what happens. The last one is left for you to answer.

- **Is it legal?**

In this situation, the question is whether or not the proposal conforms to the rules of the house that the students agreed to when they moved in. Since they agreed to split everything equally, it does not. What Samantha is suggesting is a temporary adjustment of the agreement, which Jinny could accept.

- **Is it expedient?**

They have to pay the rent or get kicked out of the apartment. This proposal would allow them to keep their housing, so it would solve the immediate problem. The answer is yes.

- **Is it possible?**

Yes, if Jinny has the money.

- **What is the anticipated effect?** (What do you think would happen over the long term under this proposal? Write a short paragraph.)

Preparing to Respond

Discovering What You Think

Activity 5: Considering Your Task and Your Rhetorical Situation

Go to some newspaper Internet sites. Look for articles on an important person who has been accused of a controversial act, such as sexual harassment, plagiarism, theft, murder, embezzlement, or other issue. Apply stasis theory, to this act. Are both sides asking the same question?

Then look at how various commentators define the issue. What do different commentators call that act? Look at how people describe the quality of the act, which usually involves the social values they attach to it.

Finally, look at what people say should be done about it. Write a paragraph using stasis theory to analyze the ways in which this issue has been framed.

Example:

Edward Snowden was a computer programmer who worked as a contractor for the National Security Agency (NSA). (An Internet search on “Edward Snowden NSA” will lead to lots of articles.) In June 2013 he revealed thousands of classified documents to three journalists. He said he did this because the NSA was violating the Constitution, exceeding its mandate, and abusing its authority. He fled to Hong Kong, and then to Moscow. The Snowden case is rife with issues that lend themselves to this kind of analysis. Did he download and publish classified data? Yes, he admits it. Was it a crime, and if so, what kind of crime? This is a matter of definition. Some say it was treason, but others say it was whistleblowing. Then we get to the nature of the act. Was it patriotic or traitorous? What was the intent? And then policy: What should the U.S. do with Snowden if he leaves Russia or returns to this country?

Writing Rhetorically

Composing a Draft

Activity 6: Negotiating Voices

As you write up your analysis, make sure you identify your sources, put direct quotes in quotation marks, and paraphrase accurately.

Revising Rhetorically

Activity 7: Gathering and Responding to Feedback

Share a draft of your analysis with a partner. See if your partner thinks that your analysis has fully used the stasis questions. Ask your partner for any suggestions.

Editing

Activity 8: Editing Your Draft

Revise your draft according to the feedback you got and submit it to your teacher.