Lesson Title: Sports

Lesson Audience: Educators

Lesson Age Group: Middle Schoolers

Intro: Who are your favorite sports? Sports teams? Athletes? Do you follow athletes or sports teams?

What is the most memorable sporting event you’ve ever been to or taken part in?

Exercise: What’s in a Team?

Present the students with a theoretical scenario: (Optional, depending on educator’s comfort level and familiarity with sports: can use a student’s favorite team or team familiar to a local area for an example. For the purposes of this lesson I will use a made up team):

Let’s imagine that an MLB team has just won the World Series. There are 26 people on a professional baseball team’s roster. There are also many coaches including a manager, pitching and hitting coaches, coaches who are stationed at first and third bases, and others.

* How many people from the championship team would have to leave in the offseason for you to consider this a different team?
* Is it the same team if one player leaves in the offseason? (Does it matter who that player is? Hopefully students will arrive to this question on their own)
* Is it the same if half of the players stay and half of the players leave?
* Is it the same team if all of the players who started games leave and the rest of the 26 players who sat on the bench stay?
* Is it the same team if everyone leaves and entirely new players replace them? For example, if the team in question is the Yankees, the new players would still be wearing the same pinstriped uniforms, but the team’s composition would be completely different.
* Is it the same team if all the players stay the same, but the team owner decides they want to move the team to Clinton, New York, change the team name and change the uniforms to neon green?
* Is it the same team if nobody leaves at all, but everyone is one year older when the next season starts?

**Lesson Wrap-up**: The team is an idea that’s hard to define, made up of things that are much easier to define. We know what players are, we can explain what uniforms and names are, but the team is where all of these things come together. When one of these things changes, sometimes we think that the whole team changes, and sometimes we don’t. But there are no rules to this. If you ever watch ESPN or listen to people talk about sports on the radio, people argue about these types of subjects for hours. The secret is that there is never really an answer, because depending on how you look at it, everything could always be changing while the team, whether it’s the Yankees or the Red Sox, continues to exist under the same name and logo.

Extra Resource for Educators:

This is an excerpt from Malcolm Gladwell’s podcast Revisionist History. He discusses the Ship of Theseus, an ancient philosophical hypothetical thematically similar to the lesson above. Use this to familiarize yourself with the concepts and multiple perspectives one can take regarding permanence.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sQkAhbOm964Wq14qispQ_9uKXj1oOzfP/view?usp=sharing>