

# Game: “Good News, Bad News”

Adapted from an activity by David Shapiro on the Northwest Center for Philosophy for Children

<http://depts.washington.edu/nwcenter/lessonsclassroom.html>

## Summary

This reasoning game is rather like the old parlour game of consequences but it focuses even more on consequences than the original.

## Introduction

To begin the exercise, say you are going to have the students do an exercise that gets them thinking about two sides of an issue by thinking about possible consequences -- both good and bad. As an example, consider that old joke: “A guy goes to the doctor for some tests. He comes back a week later and the doctor says, ‘Well, I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is, the tests came back and we determined that you only have 48 hours to live.’ The guy says, ‘That’s the good news?! What’s the bad news?’ The doctor says, ‘Well, we tried to get in touch with you all day yesterday.’”

After the groans that this inevitably solicits, another more tasteful example might be in order, something like, “The good news is, our hometown baseball team won yesterday. The bad news is, their star player was injured.” With this basic illustration on the table, the class will be ready to move into the exercise.

## How it works.

1. Pass out sheets of paper on which are pre-printed alternating lines of “The good news is: \_\_\_\_\_,” and “The bad news is: \_\_\_\_\_” The paper is filled; there are six or seven of each, alternating one after another. (We've provided these as attachments below but you can choose not to use them; simply have students write the phrases before each sentence during the exercise. Still, experience has proven that that the exercise works better when pre-printed sheets are used.)
2. Explain to students we will simply follow line of consequences where they lead and that we might enjoy being surprised by the result. But stress the serious point behind the exercise – predicting consequences is an important preliminary to making any judgement.
3. Students begin by writing ONE piece of good news on their paper. Emphasize this! Often a student will already be in the process of filling out the entire sheet. Reiterate that students have been asked to merely fill out the first piece of good news; go no further!
4. After all the students have completed writing their first piece of good news, they then hand that paper to the person next to them; that person reads the good news and writes a piece of bad news that follows from it. Again, emphasize, just the bad news! The second student then folds down his or her paper so only the last piece of bad news is visible. He or she then hands that paper to another student who reads the visible piece of bad news, writes an associated good news, then folds down the paper so only the good news just written is visible, and then hands it to another student, and so on and on until the paper is completely filled.

5. Arrange the activity so students don't pass their papers to the same person every time. As each paper is completed — it ends with a piece of bad news — have students return it to a pile in the front of the room. When all the papers are turned in, hand each one back to the original writer of good news. Students read the papers and are asked to notice especially the first and last lines and the degree to which they could have predicted that last line from the first.

The game is fun and pretty lively. Students enjoy trying to guess claims from the reasons offered for them. And they generally do a pretty good job of it.

## **Comments**

The exercise tends to be good fun, albeit a bit silly. Students routinely use the opportunity to be somewhat inappropriate in what they write, or scatological, or just goofy. It's a good idea to set as a ground rule that no names of anyone in the class can be mentioned, and that 'nasty' comments will not be read out.

Despite the somewhat frivolous nature of the activity, students write, reflect and respond to the ideas of others. They allow themselves to follow a chain of consequences where it leads with them without any preconceived notion of where it's supposed to end up. And they can look for connections among the various statements later.