



Social Pressure Basics

Persuasion & Influence · Tier 1: How Persuasion Works · Component 5

Grades: 6–8 **Time:** 30–40 min (standard) **Format:** individual or pairs

Students learn *why* we go along with a group — the two real reasons it usually feels right — and what going along can quietly cost.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Middle schoolers feel group pressure constantly and are often told only "resist it." That advice fails because it ignores *why* going along is usually smart. Naming the two reasons (fitting in, and trusting the group knows) turns a vague force into something a student can actually examine in the moment.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- One copy of the **Student pages** (Student pp. 1–3) per student or pair.
- No prep required; scenarios are provided.

HOW TO RUN IT

1. **Read the explainer together (8–10 min).** Student p. 1 gives the two reasons.
2. **Work the activity (15–20 min).** Students sort scenarios by *which* reason is at work and name the cost (Student pp. 2–3).
3. **Debrief (10–15 min).** Run the Discussion Guide (Instructor p. 3). Keep it non-judgmental — the point is seeing the pull, not shaming it.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

- Distinguishing "I want to fit in" from "I assume they know something I don't."
- Naming a real **cost** to going along, not just "it's bad."
- Recognizing that going along is often the *right* call — the skill is choosing on purpose.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT (COMMON CORE)

Codes reflect the grade 6 band; grade 7–8 equivalents apply equally.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1** — Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.3** — Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, distinguishing those supported by evidence from those that are not.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.8** — Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text.

Printing: Hand students the 3 Student pages. The 3 Instructor pages are for you.



Social Pressure Basics

In depth: why the group pulls, and when it costs

Going along with a group is usually adaptive, not weak. Two distinct pressures drive it, and separating them is what lets a student evaluate a moment instead of just feeling it.

REASON ONE

Fitting in (belonging)

We match the group to be accepted and avoid standing out. Belonging is a real human need, and the pull toward one's own group is strong (in-group favoritism). This is *normative* pressure: we go along even when we privately disagree, because the cost of visibly not fitting feels high.

REASON TWO

Assuming the group knows

When unsure, we treat "lots of people do this" as evidence that it's correct (bandwagon effect). Often it is — crowds carry real information. But in a tight group the same pull hardens into shared blind spots, where no one checks because everyone assumes someone else did (groupthink).

TWO THINGS TO KEEP REPEATING

Going along is often right. Copying the crowd at a crosswalk or a fire drill is smart. The skill is not resistance for its own sake — it's noticing *which* reason is pulling, and choosing on purpose. **Name the cost.** The question is never "did I go along?" but "what did going along cost here — and was it worth it?"



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Debrief prompts & a sample answer key

DISCUSSION ANCHOR

- What are the **two reasons** we go along with a group? How do they feel different from the inside?
- Name a time going along was the **smart** choice.
- Name a time going along had a real **cost** — to you or someone else.
- How can you tell "everyone's doing it" is giving you real information versus just pressure?

ONE-LINE TAKEAWAY

Going along isn't weak — but do it on purpose, and know the cost.

SAMPLE READS FOR PART A

SCENARIO	WHICH REASON · POSSIBLE COST
Everyone claps after the speech, so you clap too.	<i>Fitting in; low cost — usually fine.</i>
The class agrees on an answer, so you change yours without checking.	<i>Assuming the group knows; cost = you stop thinking, and the group might be wrong.</i>
Friends skip a rule and pressure you to join.	<i>Fitting in; cost = your own judgment / consequences.</i>



Social Pressure Basics

Why we go along — and what it costs

Everyone feels the pull to go along with a group. It isn't weakness — it's usually smart, for two real reasons. Knowing the reasons lets you choose on purpose instead of just getting swept.

REASON 1

Fitting in

We match the group so we're accepted and don't stand out. Belonging matters — that's a real human need, not a flaw. But this pull can make you go along *even when you quietly disagree*, just to avoid being the odd one out.

REASON 2

Assuming the group knows

When you're not sure what to do, "everyone's doing it" feels like a clue that it must be right. Often it *is* — if everyone runs, you should probably run. But sometimes the whole group is just guessing, and no one checks because everyone assumes someone else already did.

Going along is often the right call. Copying the crowd at a crosswalk or a fire drill is smart. The skill isn't fighting the group every time — it's noticing *which* reason is pulling you, and asking one question: **what does going along cost here, and is it worth it?**



Social Pressure Basics

Name: _____ Date: _____

Quick recap: Reason 1 = fitting in · Reason 2 = assuming the group knows · Always ask: what's the cost?

PART A — WHICH REASON?

For each scene, write **1** (fitting in) or **2** (assuming the group knows) — sometimes both — and name one possible **cost**.

SCENE	REASON (1/2) · COST
1. Everyone claps after the speech, so you clap too.	
2. The class agrees on an answer, so you change yours without rechecking.	
3. Your friends all order the same thing, so you do too, though you wanted something else.	
4. Everyone lines up at a certain door, so you assume that's the right one.	

PART B — SMART OR COSTLY?

Circle one scene above where going along was probably **smart**, and one where it had a real **cost**. Be ready to say why.



PART C — YOUR CALL

Think of a real time you went along with a group. Which reason was pulling you — fitting in, or assuming they knew? What did it cost, if anything?

PART D — READ THE CROWD

"Everyone's doing it" can be real information *or* just pressure. Write one question you could ask yourself to tell the difference.
