



Alternative Explanations: Lesson Plan

Topic	
<p>Alternative explanations are alternative ways of explaining a single phenomenon. Good alternative explanations are credible ones, supported by evidence and uninfluenced by bias. We find the best alternative explanation by weighing the evidence in favor of each one and determining which one has the most abundant, reliable, and sound evidence supporting it. Often, the best explanations combine strong features of various alternative explanations to provide a richer picture of the phenomenon. So, for example, the best explanation of what makes professional athletes able to perform well will combine features of several explanations, ranging from facts about their diet to their exercise regimen to their body composition.</p>	
Possible subjects/classes	Time needed
Science, English, history, philosophy, psychology, sociology	30-45 minutes
Video link:	
https://academy4sc.org/topic/alternative-explanations/	
Objective: <i>What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?</i>	
<p>By the end of this lesson, students will be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain what makes for a good alternative explanation. • Articulate why investigating alternative explanations matters. • Articulate how they can incorporate alternative explanations into advocating for a cause they care about. 	
Key Concepts & Vocabulary	
N/A	
Materials Needed	
Worksheet if doing activity 2	
Before you watch	

Quick Write

Ask students to write about a time they were rejected for something they really wanted. Have them list three explanations for why they think they were rejected and ask them to argue for the explanation they think is the best one. Emphasize that they won't have to share their example unless they want to. This introductory activity will help make the lesson personal and realistic, because these explanations may be driven by strong emotions and bias.

While you watch

1. Define alternative explanations
2. Name two scenarios that could benefit from considering alternative explanations

After you watch/discussion questions

1. When is the last time you missed an opportunity to defend a cause to someone because you assumed that they wouldn't understand or care about it? What are some alternative explanations for why you got that sense from them?
2. Consider at least three credible alternative explanations for why someone may disagree with your view on something you care deeply about. How can you respond to each of these?
3. What is a view you have for which you think you have the best explanation? Consider the most powerful alternative explanation and explain what makes yours better.

Activity Ideas

1. Consider an important social movement in history (the French Revolution, the suffrage movement, the abolition movement, etc.) and list three explanations of why it happened or what triggered it. The social movement should be one that has been discussed in class or that students should have learned about by this point. These explanations should refer to the structural circumstances leading up to these events (political, social, economic, etc.). So, for example, three explanations for the French Revolution could be Enlightenment ideals, political conflict between the monarchy and the nobility, and economic hardship.
2. Assign debate activity on corresponding worksheet



Sources/places to learn more

1. Dobelli, R. (2013). *The art of thinking clearly: Better thinking, better decisions*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
2. Ledandowky, S., Ullrich, K. H. E., Seifert, C. M., Schwarz, N., & Cook, J. (2012). *Misinformation and its correction*, 13(3), 106–131.
3. Ross, H. J. (2014). *Everyday bias: Identifying and navigating unconscious judgments in our daily lives*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.