

BIG IDEA 1.3

Activism can make a difference

FOCUS: What action can we take?

Activism means taking action to bring about social or political change. In a democracy, you have the power and the means to address injustices, make your point of view heard, and create change—or even stop a change you don't think should happen.

Activism can be working to persuade governments to change laws, or joining major organizations such as Earthwatch or Amnesty International. But those are not the only forms of activism. You are an activist if you volunteer for a charity, wear a T-shirt against bullying, or support a cause on social media. When you make your voice heard or **advocate** for what you believe, you are taking civic action. You don't have to dedicate your life to a cause.

Options for action

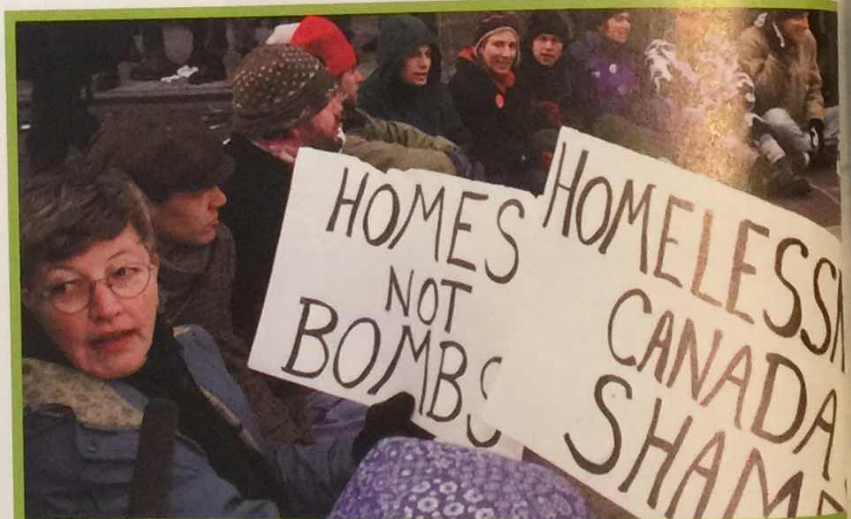
Once you have decided to take action, you have many options. You can act individually, or you can join with others who share your views and act collectively. You can focus your attention on government policies, causes, organizations, or the public. The actions you choose depend on the issue, as well as your goals, time, and resources. Do you want to **donate**, **educate**, **communicate**, or **agitate**?

"You just need to be a flea against injustice. Enough committed fleas biting strategically can make even the biggest dog uncomfortable and transform even the biggest nation."

Marian Wright Edelman

"There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest."

Elie Wiesel



SOURCE 1: Protesters stage a sit-in against homelessness. Would you ever join a protest like this one? Why or why not?



DONATE

Give money, goods, skills, or time

- Donate money, clothing, food, etc.
- Donate your time/volunteer
- Fundraise
- Buy ethical goods



Builds on what others have accomplished



Leaves decision-making to others



EDUCATE

Raise awareness

- Educate yourself or others
- Stage a media event
- Lead or organize group events



Great foundation for future change



Takes time



COMMUNICATE

Say what you think

- Speak your mind
- Wear a T-shirt or button
- Raise awareness online (e.g., social media, blog, etc.)
- Create posters, flyers, art, music, or an ad campaign
- Vote



Directly influences others



Must be willing to accept criticism from others and respond



AGITATE

Stage a public event

- Sign a petition
- Join a march, rally, or protest
- Boycott or support a business
- Organize a protest



Gets a lot of attention



Can only convey a simple message

ACTIVISM

SOURCE 2: How might you decide what action to take? What other pros and cons might you add to the diagram to help you?

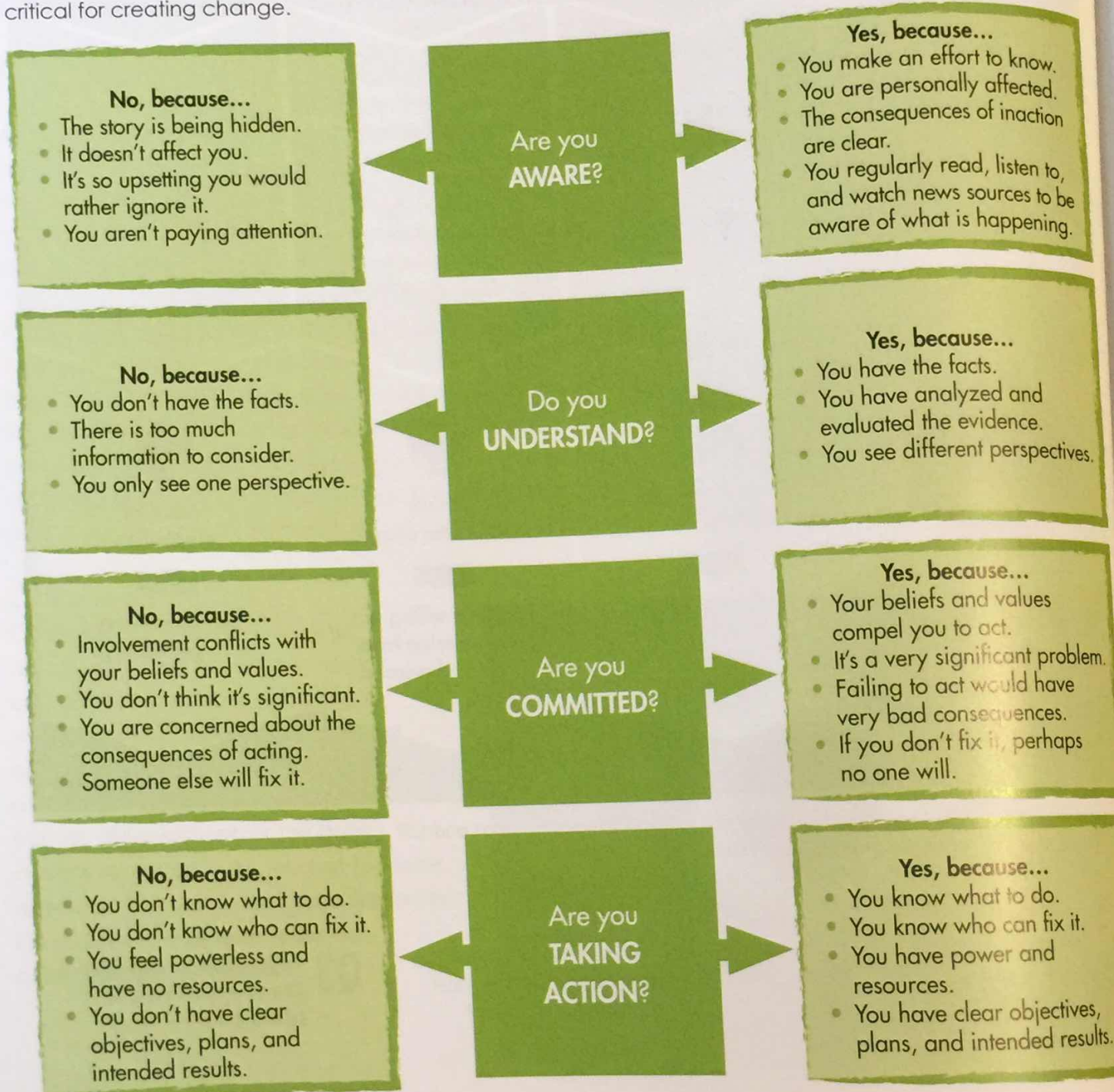
Q1 Can democracy be effective without active citizenship? Why or why not?

Q2 How can you determine which action would be most appropriate for a cause?

Q3 Which type of activism are you most likely to participate in? Why?

FOCUS: Why do we act or fail to act?

Why do we act? Why do we fail to act? Answering one of these questions will help you answer the other. You probably won't take action if you don't know there is a problem or acknowledge that it exists. And it's not very likely that much will get done if you don't really understand what's happening or care about it. Even if you are aware, care, and understand, it will be hard to change things if you don't have a plan or the resources to take action. Awareness, understanding, commitment, and action are critical for creating change.



Creating change

You can use your understanding of why people act or fail to act to create positive change, big or small. If you want other people to share your awareness, understanding, commitment, and knowledge, then you need to think about how to make that happen.

Using the power of political thinking will help you understand other people's perspectives on your desired change and the instability it might create.

Criteria for analyzing how to create change	Definitely	Probably	Probably not	Definitely not	Not sure
Are enough people already aware that change is needed?					
Do enough people already understand what is wrong and why?					
Do enough people already support the change?					
Is anyone already taking action and is it working?					
Will people with different perspectives oppose the change?					
Will change create any instability, and if so, for whom?					
Do people see this as an ethical issue of right and wrong?					

▲ **SOURCE 3:** If you want to create change, set your objectives based on where you think taking action will create the best results. For example, if awareness and understanding are high, then you can focus on building a commitment to act. Choose an issue and decide on the best approach to create change.

Objectives	Key questions	Possible actions
RAISE AWARENESS	Why aren't people more aware? Who needs to be more aware and where are they? What activities will best raise awareness?	TWEET SHARE MARCH PHOTOGRAPH EMAIL RECORD VIDEO PROTEST ADVERTISE
INCREASE UNDERSTANDING	What facts are people missing? What evidence will be most compelling? What different perspectives should be considered?	WRITE BLOG PUBLISH REPORT POST VISIT
BUILD COMMITMENT	Do people believe it's politically significant? Are the ethical considerations obvious? Are the consequences of inaction clear?	COLLECT JOIN PETITION RALLY ORGANIZE LOBBY
GENERATE ACTION	What do you want other people to do? Are the objectives stated and understood? Is everyone clear on the intended results?	PLAN COMMUNICATE SHARE MEASURE ANTICIPATE

Q4 What do you think are the most important reasons people choose to act or fail to act in situations where change is needed?

Q5 Do you think it is ethically wrong if you choose not to act when you know change is needed to make things better? Why or why not?

Q6 Think about an issue you care about a lot. How would you rate your awareness, understanding, commitment, and action?