

Title**Society Is Like...****Time**

15 - 20 minutes working in groups to complete the worksheet. Each group is then required to present their work to the whole class (5 - 10 minutes per group).

Preparation

The class can be divided into groups of 2 or 3 students, depending on the number of perspectives to be analysed. Each group is given an analogy (for example "Society is like a human body") to brainstorm.

Materials

One copy of the "Society Is Like..." sheet per student. This sheet has two columns. The first requires the students, working in their groups, to brainstorm some characteristics of the analogy being used. The second requires the students to say how **each** characteristic is similar to society. A white board / flipchart will be required for the presentation of each group's ideas.

Prior Knowledge

Students need to be given a general introduction to the idea of sociological perspectives such as Functionalism, Marxism, Feminism and the like. This should be quite general in tone, but sufficient to give students a basic idea of the perspectives they are going to analyse.

The main purpose of this exercise is to introduce the idea of different theoretical views about the nature of society. Many teachers use the standard **organismic analogy** as a means of teaching students about the fundamentals of **Functionalism** and, within certain limits, this is a good and interesting way of both outlining general ideas and encouraging students to associate something unfamiliar with something familiar. It follows from this that further analogies can be used to introduce the basic principles of many other sociological perspectives (Marxism, Weberian sociology, Interactionism, Radical feminism and the like).

- The analogies can be anything you believe to be appropriate (students can even think of their own). Some suggestions might be:
 - **Human Body = Functionalism**
 - **League Table** (e.g. Football league, school exam results) = **Conflict theory (Marxist, Weberian)**
 - **A Play = Interactionism**
 - **A War = Radical Feminism**

Follow-up Work

If you want to develop this exercise further, consider the following:

1. Either in class (groups) or as homework the students can be asked to reflect on the work they've done in relation to their analogy, using the following questions:

“Thinking about the work you've done in terms of your analogy”:

- a. Who are the main winners in the type of society you've described?
- b. How do these people try to maintain their privileged position?

- c. Who are the main losers in the type of society you've described?
- d. How do these people try to change their underprivileged position?

“Thinking about the answers you've just produced”:

- e. What is the basis of social order in society (why does the situation you've described continue over time?).
- f. What creates conflict in the society you've described?
- g. How (and why) does the society you've described change?

2. On the basis of your worksheet, write a summative paragraph beginning:

“Society is like [analogy] because...”.

3. “Theory and Methods” by Helen Bull (Philip Allen Publishers, 1997) contains a number of useful lesson plans on sociological perspectives. The pack is expensive, but the materials can be photocopied royalty-free.

4. A homework exercise for your students could be constructed on the following lines:

For each characteristic identified on the worksheet (maximum of five), write a paragraph that includes the following:

- a. An opening statement that identifies **what** society is like.
- b. A brief explanation of **why** you think society is like this.
- c. An example of **how** society is like this.
- d. A brief **criticism** of the idea that society is actually like the characteristic identified in “a”.

A further development on the above might be to use the Essay-writing template available in the Downloads section of this site as the basis for the construction of an answer.

Sociological Perspective: _____

A [Name of analogy used]
has the following characteristics:

An example of each characteristic
applied to society might be: