

They hate each other's political views – so why have they become friends?

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

1 Warmer

Imagine that you are in a large group of people who you do not know very well, for example at a wedding. Rank the topics below in order from 1 (the topic you really *don't* want to talk about) to 8 (a topic it's ok to talk about).

- | | |
|----------|--------------------------|
| 1. _____ | a. politics |
| 2. _____ | b. gay marriage |
| 3. _____ | c. racism |
| 4. _____ | d. the environment |
| 5. _____ | e. football |
| 6. _____ | f. the use of face masks |
| 7. _____ | g. veganism |
| 8. _____ | h. smoking |

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers will help you.

citizen

befriend

liberal

conservative

view

- become someone's friend and be kind to them _____ (para 4)
- someone who accepts the way other people live their lives _____ (para 6)
- not willing to accept much change, especially in the traditional values of society _____ (para 6)
- an opinion _____ (para 7)
- someone who lives in a particular town, city or country _____ (para 8)

evil

divisive

tough

fear

unbearable

- difficult _____ (para 10)
- likely to cause arguments between people _____ (para 11)
- very bad _____ (para 13)
- so bad you cannot cope with it _____ (para 14)
- something bad or unpleasant that you are afraid might happen _____ (para 17)

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Poppy Noor

30 September, 2020

- 1 When Glenn Stanton and Sheila Kloefkorn met, they knew they were not going to see eye to eye.
- 2 Stanton, the director of a Christian organization, had spent years fighting gay marriage.
- 3 Kloefkorn married her wife in 2014, on the day gay marriage became legal in Arizona.
- 4 But today, Stanton and Kloefkorn are friends. They met through Braver Angels, an organization that encourages people to befriend and understand people who have different political opinions. Today, they laugh when people are surprised at their friendship.
- 5 "I don't believe that Glenn is against me. I just believe he feels strongly about the things he cares about, and that's a great thing," says Kloefkorn.
- 6 Making friends with the other side may sound crazy, but Kloefkorn did it for a very personal reason: she is the only liberal in her strongly conservative family.
- 7 Her mother was the only person in her family who had the same political views. When her mother died in 2015, Kloefkorn felt very alone. And Trump's election only made this feeling worse.
- 8 Stanton just likes the idea of making new friends and wants to learn how to become a better citizen.
- 9 "Making new friends and hearing different stories that I know nothing about: that's good," he says.
- 10 It can sometimes be tough. But thousands of people across the US return every week to make friends and try to understand other people, hoping to make the country a better place.
- 11 "Why did we decide that we can't be friends with people we don't agree with?" asks Stanton. "I strongly support things I believe in. But I really am worried by the divisive nature of our country."
- 12 Most Americans today choose to spend their time with people who vote for the same political party as them. Some even hate people with different opinions.
- 13 Always seeing people who are different as evil stops us from making more friends, discovering new things and also seeing the world as a wonderful place.
- 14 Politics tears families apart. Some no longer speak to their relatives if they voted for Trump, and they find election time unbearable and don't want to think about Thanksgiving, when families normally come together to celebrate.
- 15 Braver Angels asks people to listen to how their partners think other people see them, and how this makes them feel.
- 16 "It helps to listen to why people believe what they believe, even though I don't agree. It helps me because then I don't have to feel so bad all the time, especially at family dinners," says Kloefkorn.
- 17 Now, at Thanksgiving, Kloefkorn tries to listen to what her father's fears are. "We try to just focus on the things that we love about each other," she says.

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3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article?

1. Glenn and Sheila have very different political views.
2. They laugh when people are surprised by their friendship.
3. They plan to spend Thanksgiving together every year.
4. Glenn is against gay marriage.
5. Sheila is married to a conservative man.
6. The only person in Sheila's family who shared her political views was her father.
7. Most Americans try to understand people who have different political views from them.
8. Braver Angels is an organization that helps liberals and conservatives understand each other.
9. Glenn thinks that America should become more divisive.
10. Sheila wants to listen to her conservative father and try to understand his fears.

4 A useful expression

- a. Find and underline the following expression in the article. Then match it with the correct meaning below.

see eye to eye

1. be the same height as someone
2. agree with someone or have the same opinion as them
3. hate someone because they are different from you

- b. Use the expression to complete the sentences. Change the tense where necessary.

1. I don't _____ with my father on many things.
2. I always _____ with my old boss when I worked for him.
3. I have never really _____ with my sister's husband.

- c. Now use the expression in two sentences about yourself.

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5 Using the key words

Use some of the key words from task 2 to complete the sentences.

1. He's having a really _____ time at the moment.
2. It was so hot last week. The heat was _____.
3. She married an American and became a US _____.
4. The murderer was a truly _____ person.
5. Their _____ on marriage and divorce are very liberal.

6 Discussion

- Look again at task 1. What other topics would you *not* talk about with that group of people?
- Is it possible to be good friends with someone who strongly supports a different political party?
- Do you have any friends or relatives with very different opinions from yours? Do you argue a lot or just not talk about difficult topics?

7 Webquest

- a. Find out more about the Braver Angels organization: braverangels.org.
- b. Scroll down the homepage to watch the video 'Introducing Braver Angels'.
- c. Circle the word you hear most often in the video.

hate

love

courage

weakness