

Description: In this lesson, educators will ask students a number of questions about a sports team undergoing different types of hypothetical changes over the course of an offseason. The questions, which discuss player replacements to uniform and location switches, invite students to grapple with the question, “how much change has to occur over the course of an offseason in order for one team to become a new one?” Without ever naming them, this lesson involves the use of both the Mereological Theory of Identity and the theory of Spatio-Temporal Continuity.

Introduction: Pose the following question to students:

- What is the most memorable sporting event you’ve ever been to or taken part in?

As students respond, you might ask some of the follow-up questions below, or come up with your own:

- What are your favorite sports teams? Athletes? If you are a fan of professional sports, would you consider yourself more a fan of certain teams, or certain players?

Main Discussion: What’s In a Team?

Present the class with the following theoretical scenario: (Optional note: depending on the teacher’s familiarity with sports, feel free to use a local team or team familiar to a local area for an example).

A Major League Baseball team has just won the World Series. There are 26 people on a professional baseball team’s roster. There are also many coaches including a manager, pitching and hitting coaches, and many others.

Over the course of the offseason, the team’s business department gives the owner a number of suggestions they think will improve the team’s performance and ticket sales. However, the team’s owner, who is fond of philosophy, loves the team that won the championship this year, and doesn’t want to do anything that would make it so next year’s team is a different team from this year’s team.

Split the class into groups of three to four students. Give the groups roughly fifteen minutes to discuss the following questions, spending a few minutes with each.

- Will it be the same team if one player leaves in the offseason? Does it matter who this player is?
- Will it be the same team if half of the players stay and half of the players leave?
- Will it be the same team if all of the players who started games leave and the rest of the 26 players who sat on the bench stay?

- Will it be the same team if everyone leaves and entirely new players replace them? For example, if the team is the Yankees, the new players would still be wearing the same pinstripe uniforms, but the players wearing them would be completely different.
- Will it be the same team if all the players stay the same, but the team owner decides they want to move the team to our city, change the team name and change the uniforms to neon green?
- Will it be the same team if nobody leaves at all, but everyone is one year older when the next season starts?

Reconvene and discuss the questions as a group.

Wrap-Up Question:

- In your own life, what are some groups you are a part of? Do they change and become an entirely different group when they change? (Examples: family, youth sports teams, friend groups)