
Start With Sorry – Senior High School Lesson Plan (Years 11–12, ages 17–18)

Rationale

Senior students are increasingly independent, encounter complex relationships, face higher-stakes conflict, and are forming values they'll carry into adulthood. Mastery of apology, repair, and accountability is vital for personal wellbeing, leadership, and community trust.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

Analyse why apologies matter in personal, professional, and public life.
Evaluate the effectiveness of apologies in case studies (personal, historical, public/media).
Practise nuanced apology and repair strategies for complex or high-stakes situations (e.g., leadership roles, online harm, group dynamics).
Reflect on personal values relating to responsibility, pride, and reconciliation.

Lesson Outline

1. Introduction: The Role of Apology in Adult Life (10 min)

Prompt: Ask students to consider situations where an apology made or broke trust—in relationships, politics, legal disputes, or professional life.

Discussion: “When is an apology not enough? When does it restore trust? What are the risks and rewards in apologising?”

2. Case Study Analysis: Apologies in Public and Private Spheres (20 min)

Groups of 3–4: Assign each group a real-world scenario or public apology—examples may include:

- A political leader’s apology for a policy failure.
- A company CEO’s statement after a data breach or scandal.
- An athlete or influencer’s apology for social media misconduct.
- Peer-to-peer conflicts in the school or community.

Task: For each, analyse using the “6 Elements of an Advanced Apology:”

Acknowledge the harm and context.

Take explicit responsibility (no minimising/blame-shifting).

Express genuine regret and understanding of impact.

Offer meaningful repair or restitution.

Outline steps to prevent repeat harm.

Invite dialogue and feedback.

Groups report their findings: Was the apology effective? Why or why not? What was missing or done well?



3. Debrief and Values Exploration

Whole class discussion:

“How do power, privilege, or position affect the way apologies are given and received?”

“Can an apology ever ‘fix’ deep or historical harm alone?”

“Is forgiveness always the goal, or can repair happen without it?”

Reflection prompt: “How does your own sense of pride, fear, or responsibility affect your willingness to apologise as you get older?”

4. Role-Play: Advanced Apology Practice

Scenarios: Students work in pairs/groups to role-play nuanced situations (e.g., as a team captain, peer mentor, committee member, or addressing online/offline harm that requires public and private apologies).

Encourage: Using all 6 elements in high-stakes, complex, or emotionally charged contexts.

Feedback: Peers provide constructive input on how the apology felt, what worked, and what could be improved.

5. Leadership and Apology in the Real World

Discussion: “Why do leaders sometimes avoid apologies or make them poorly? What are the consequences for teams, organisations, or communities?”

Individual Task: Draft an open apology as if you’re a leader who made a significant error impacting many (e.g., captaining a team, leading a club, managing a work shift).

Peer review: Swap drafts for feedback, focusing on authenticity and potential for real repair.

6. Personal Reflection and Future Application

Journal Prompts:

“Describe a time you apologised for something important. What was difficult, and what helped?”

“How do you think your approach to apology will change as you leave school and enter adult life or work?”

“Identify an area in your life or community where an apology and repair could make a difference—what would it take?”

Optionally, submit reflections or share insights in a class circle for closure.

Assessment

Quality of participation in discussion, case analysis, and role-play.

Depth and insight in written reflections or apology drafts.

Thoughtful, relevant contribution to group work.

Application of advanced apology elements in scenarios and journal entries.

Extension & Enrichment



Research assignment: Analyse a major public apology its context, analysis of apology effectiveness, community response, and what deeper repair would require.

Leadership Project: Students design an “Apology Charter” for a club, sporting team, or workplace, outlining collective values and processes after mistakes or harm.

Resources

“6 Elements of an Advanced Apology”

1. Fully acknowledge the harm and context.
2. Take explicit, personal responsibility.
3. Express sincere regret and understanding.
4. Offer meaningful repair or restitution.
5. Explain steps to prevent recurrence.
6. Invite dialogue, questions, or feedback.

Teacher Tips

Invite open discussion, respecting emotional safety—apology can touch on sensitive real-life issues.

Model mature apology and ongoing commitment to repair—students are watching. Allow space for students who may not feel ready to share personal experiences; written reflection can be private.

Encourage connections to leadership, citizenship, and personal responsibility as students prepare to transition out of school.

This plan intentionally deepens apology work for senior students, equipping them for life beyond school where accountability, social repair, and leadership are critical.