

Activity Suggestions: Grades 3-5

Stereotype Busters

Class Time Needed: 20 minutes

Materials

- A cassette tape or CD player and recorded music
- 4 small containers
- Pieces of paper, each printed with a stereotype (Examples: All redheads have short tempers, all nurses are women, all tall people like basketball, only men like sports cars, all doctors are rich)

Note: Be careful not to use racial or other stereotypes that might offend participants.

Objective

- Students will learn appropriate ways to address stereotyping.

Introduction

Each of us hears or makes stereotypical comments every day. Students need to become aware of the damaging effects of generalizations and stereotypes. They also need to develop tools for addressing stereotypes when they hear them and checking their own thinking when they find themselves using stereotypes to make judgments. This activity gives students an opportunity to practice ways to reduce stereotyping.

Procedure

1. Have the students arrange their chairs in a large circle.
2. Review the concepts of stereotypes and prejudice and come to an agreement about definitions. In this context, a stereotype is an oversimplified statement based on a single characteristic. For example, the statement “All men hate to cook” expresses a stereotype. Prejudice is to *pre-judge* or to form an opinion (usually negative) about someone or something before all the facts are known. “Richard can’t cook—he’s a guy!” is an example of prejudice.
3. Discuss why stereotypes and prejudice are harmful. For example, they are often based on faulty information, they get in the way of knowing people as individuals, and they can lead to serious misunderstandings.
4. Tell students that even though it is easy to fall into the habit of using stereotypes to prejudge people, there are ways to reduce stereotypes and combat prejudice. One way is to check our own thinking, to be careful of jumping to conclusions based on generalizations or others’ opinions. Another way is to politely challenge stereotypes when we hear them by offering evidence that the stereotype is false.
5. Model some statements that “bust” the men-hate-to-cook-stereotype, for example:
 - I don’t like to stereotype, so I can’t agree with you. My brother makes the best bread I’ve ever tasted.
 - I don’t like to stereotype, so I can’t agree with you. I’m sure there are many men who like to cook.



6. Explain that the students will participate in a game that will help them become “Stereotype Busters.” Participants will pass a container around the circle when the music begins. When the music stops, the student who is holding the container will read the stereotype it holds. Then, the student to his or her right will respond, using statements similar to those modeled earlier. Encourage other students in the circle to offer additional suggestions.

7. Repeat the activity with the remaining containers.

Debriefing

Use the following questions to help students think about how and when to challenge stereotypes in real life situations. **Note: During the debriefing, be sure to discuss when it is and is not appropriate to challenge statements made by other people.**

1. How did it feel to speak up about stereotypes?
2. What happened when it was your turn to respond? Was it easy or difficult to “bust” the stereotype?
3. What are some other stereotypes? How do you think these are learned? What are some ways to respond to stereotypes?
4. It has been said that a stereotypical statement tells more about the person who says it than about the people who are being stereotyped. What does this mean? Do you agree or disagree?
5. Do you think you could really use “Stereotype Busters” to check your own thinking? Would you feel comfortable doing this with a family member? A friend?
6. What if you heard an older person make a stereotypical statement? (Caution students that it is best to know people before challenging their statements. We can’t predict a stranger’s response. The best response is to do a mental check to make sure we are not influenced by someone else’s prejudices.)
7. What advice would you give to a friend who is the object of stereotyping and prejudice?



Extending the Ideas

- If stereotypes (oversimplified images of people, issues, or events) lead to prejudice (judgments based on stereotypical images), then prejudice leads to discrimination—treating someone unfairly because we believe their differences make them inferior. Discuss this continuum with your students, using news stories or fictional stories that deal with discrimination issues as examples. Have students look for stories related to discrimination in magazines and newspapers and on television broadcasts over a period of several days. Have students identify the stereotypes that lie behind these stories. What assumptions (prejudgments) were made about the people who experienced discrimination?
- If your class is corresponding with a Peace Corps Volunteer through World Wise Schools, ask the Volunteer questions like these.
 - Did you have any preconceived ideas about your host country before going there? How were these prejudgements changed during your volunteer service?
 - Do the people in your host country have preconceived ideas about Americans? How do you correct these ideas?
 - Are there other stereotypes in your host country similar to the ones in the United States?
- People often develop oversimplified ideas about the homeless. A study of the causes of homelessness and the services available for the homeless in your community might lead your class to a service-learning project. After studying the problem, and learning about the issues, students could develop a plan to help meet community needs. Use the Service-Learning Rubric in the introduction to this guide to help plan a project with strong impact.

People Tags²⁹

Class Time Needed: 30 minutes

Materials

One copy of “People Tags” for every four students

Objectives

- Students will understand how labels, even those that seem neutral, can influence our thinking about people.
- Students will recognize the importance of getting to know a person before making judgments.

Introduction

Labels are a convenient, and necessary, way of organizing information about people and events. But labels often become substitutes for thought and experience. Even when labels are accurate and neutral, they describe only one aspect of a person. When they are used as the sole source of information, they limit our understanding and cut us off from full communication. “People Tags” is an activity that illustrates how misleading labels can be when they are applied to people.

Procedure

1. Prepare for the lesson by making one copy of “People Tags” for every four students. Cut off the fact cards and keep them for the second part of the activity.
2. Divide students into groups of four. Give each group a set of people cards (Uncle Fred, Aunt Jennifer, etc.) and object cards (dictionary, clock, etc.). Do not give out the fact cards yet.
3. Assign the task: You are doing your holiday shopping for Uncle Fred, who rides in a motorcycle gang; Aunt Jennifer, a librarian; Cousin George, a Navy recruit; and Great-Aunt Phyllis, a senior citizen. From the collection in front of you, which gifts would you choose for each?
4. After a few minutes, discuss the following.
 - Who gave Uncle Fred the leather jacket? Aunt Jennifer the coffee mug? Cousin George the tattoo? Great-Aunt Phyllis the rocking chair?
 - How did you decide who would get each gift?
 - How did the labels (i.e., “senior citizen,” “librarian”) influence your decisions?
5. Pass out the fact cards and comment that perhaps the students need more information before making their final gift choices.
6. Give students time to “reassign” gifts.

Debriefing

Use the following questions to guide discussion about getting to know people before making judgments.

1. How did it feel to try to choose gifts for people based on a single piece of information or label?
2. What happened when you were given more information? Who changed their gift ideas? Why?
3. What is the purpose of this activity? Can you give some examples of ways labels influence the way you think about people or things?

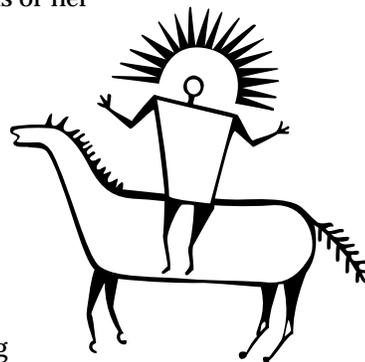
4. What are some problems that can occur when we rely too much on labels?
5. What if you were asked to choose gifts for a member of this class whom you don't know well? What could you do that would help you choose the right gift?
6. How can we apply this activity to learning about other cultures?

Extending the Ideas

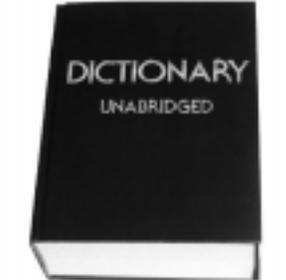
- Have students create posters to illustrate the many dimensions behind the labels with which they are most familiar—their names. Ask each student to create a list of words and phrases to correspond with letters in his or her name. Explain that the words should describe what people will learn about them when they look behind their “label” and get to know them well. Students should feel free to brag a little, as well as to describe things they may like to improve. Their names should be the center points in the designs. The teacher can use the example below or demonstrate the activity using his or her own name to get students started.

liKes baseball
 Artistic
 Reliable
 Energetic
 forgEtful
 hates Mondays

- Have students work with a partner to find out more about each other. Give them time to talk about their interests, families, hobbies, and aspirations. Urge them to look for more than the obvious details. Then have each student create a poster about his or her partner. The posters should depict the person's personality and other attributes. The posters should be used to introduce the “real” person to the rest of the class in a validation activity. Afterwards, these should be displayed around the classroom or school.
- If you are corresponding with a Peace Corps Volunteer through World Wise Schools, send him or her smaller versions of the posters mentioned above. Be sure to use lightweight paper. If the Volunteer is a teacher or working with youth, ask him or her to consider completing this same activity and sending mini posters to your class in return.



People Tags

Uncle Fred (member of a motorcycle gang)	Aunt Jennifer (librarian)	Cousin George (Navy recruit)	Great Aunt Phyllis (senior citizen)
			
			 Theater Tickets

FACT Aunt Jennifer likes modern fashions. The leather look is "in."	FACT Uncle George is looking forward to a career in the theater after his Navy tour.	FACT Uncle Fred loves antique furniture.	FACT Great-Aunt Phyllis has always been rebellious and daring.
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