

Understanding Prejudice³³

Class Time Needed: Two class periods

Materials

- A copy of “Prejudice: A Definition” for each student
- A copy of “Bogardus Social Distance Scale” for each student
- A copy of “A Continuum of Social Relationship Among Human Groups” for each student

Objective

- Students will understand the meaning of personal preference, prejudice, discrimination, and scapegoating.

Introduction

This lesson can be implemented from several different entry points, or all of the components can be used, depending on your goals and your students’ understanding of the concepts of prejudice and discrimination. When you use all three components, students will have the opportunity to move from theoretical understanding to more personal examination of their own levels of tolerance.

Entry Point A

Role-play the following activities.

- Only students wearing (brand name) ___ blue jeans can attend the school assembly.
- Only students wearing digital watches may take the social studies exam. Everyone else fails.
- Only pupils wearing (brand name) ___ shoes may go to lunch. The others must stay in the classroom during the lunch period.

Discuss the feelings of the “ins” and the “outs.” How did it feel to be denied a privilege because of an arbitrary rule? How did the privileged students behave toward those who were told they could not attend the assembly or go to lunch?



Entry Point B

Have students read “Prejudice: A Definition” and review “A Continuum of Social Relationship Among Human Groups.” Ask students to define prejudice, discrimination, and scapegoating. Help students identify behaviors that illustrate each of the terms on the continuum.

Entry Point C

Administer the “Bogardus Social Distance Scale.” Ask students to indicate on which step of the scale they would admit members of the listed ethnic and national groups. Be sure to communicate that there are no right or wrong answers. The scale is designed to help students explore their individual feelings, and their responses should be shared only on a voluntary basis. The debriefing discussion should focus on what factors influence the way we make decisions about people different from ourselves.

When students have completed the scale, ask them to look at their own papers and discuss the following:

- What do you know about these groups? What are your sources of information? How do you know what people in the groups are like?
- How did you decide where to place each group on your distance scale?
- Where do your feelings about these groups fall on the “Continuum of Social Relationship”?

Debriefing

Use the following questions to focus discussion on the importance of being aware of our own predilections and prejudices.

1. How does it feel when someone prejudices you based on your ethnic or national group? What do you learn about yourself? What do you learn about that person?
2. What happened when you used the distance scale? Were there some groups that you would exclude from any part of your life? What information did you use to make your decisions?
3. What did you learn from this activity?
4. What real life ideas are represented by the distance scale? Do you think that you have an unconscious scale that determines your level of tolerance for people who are different from you? How do you think you developed your own scale?
5. Suppose there is a group that you have placed at the sixth or seventh level on the “Bogardus Social Distance Scale.” A person from that group is introduced into your tightly knit social circle by a good friend. What would you do? What happens when people don’t interact with people from other groups?
6. What are some things you can do to learn more about individuals or groups that you don’t know well?

Extending the Ideas

- Have students do research to learn more about the people and culture of some of the groups listed above. Discuss with the students whether having more information changes the way they rank those groups on the social distance scale.
- Using the color poems for “What is Black?” in the introduction to this section as models, ask students to write culture poems based on research on several of the groups listed above or other cultures found in your community. Provide other assignments for students whose learning style is not based on the written word. Students could make collages, slide shows, or musical or multimedia presentations.



Prejudice: A Definition

by Gordon Allport

Let's look at the stages of hostile relationships—starting with “predilection.”

Predilection simply means that someone prefers one culture, one skin color, or one language as opposed to another. If you like Mexican culture and I do not, there is no use arguing about taste. We may disagree on such matters, but, as a rule, we respect one another's choice. Predilections are natural. But they are the first step toward scapegoating if they turn into more active biases, that is to say into . . .

Prejudice. A prejudice is an attitude in a closed mind. (“Don't bother me with facts, I've already made up my mind.”) Some Europeans may think that all Americans are loudmouthed spendthrifts. This stereotyped view is hard to change. It is a prejudice. An Oxford student is said to have remarked, “I despise all Americans, but I've never met one I didn't like.” This anecdote suggests that prejudgments may stand even when available evidence is against them. Some people with prejudices may think that blacks have rhythm, that Scotsmen are thrifty, or that a woman's place is in the home.

Prejudice, if kept to oneself, causes no great harm except to the mind that possesses it. But prejudice expressed leads to . . .

Discrimination. That means leaving somebody out because of prejudiced thinking. Generally it is based not on an individual's intrinsic qualities but on a “label” branding the individual as a member of a group to be looked down upon. It means separating a group forcibly and unjustly from our neighborhoods, our schools, our churches, our labor unions and our professions.

Scapegoating is hostile behavior by word or deed. The victim usually cannot fight back, for scapegoats are usually members of vulnerable minority groups. [Editor's note: “Minority” does not refer only to race or ethnicity.] The essential cowardice of scapegoating is illustrated by the persecution of the Salem “witches,” a small, frail handful of people who could not fight back.

Adapted from ABC's of Scapegoating by Gordon Allport (New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1985).



A Continuum of Social Relationships Among Human Groups

Friendly

Cooperation

Respect

Tolerance

Predilection

Prejudice

Discrimination

Scapegoating

Hostile



Bogardus Social Distance Scale

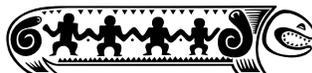
Directions: *The steps below represent a continuum—from close family relationships to complete physical and geographical separation—on which we may place people who are different from ourselves. Write a number beside each national and ethnic group listed below to indicate at what point on the continuum you would feel comfortable with members of those groups. You may keep your responses private, but you will be asked to discuss how you made your decisions.*

Steps

1. To close kinship by marriage
2. To a social group as a personal friend
3. To my street as a neighbor
4. To employment in my place of work within my occupation
5. To citizenship in my country
6. As visitors only to my country
7. Would exclude from my country

Groups

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> African American | <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> Mexican |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Armenian | <input type="checkbox"/> German | <input type="checkbox"/> Native American |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Canadian | <input type="checkbox"/> Greek | <input type="checkbox"/> Polish |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese | <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic | <input type="checkbox"/> Puerto Rican |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cuban | <input type="checkbox"/> Hungarian | <input type="checkbox"/> Scottish |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Egyptian | <input type="checkbox"/> Irish | <input type="checkbox"/> Tanzanian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> English | <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese | <input type="checkbox"/> Turkish |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Haitian | <input type="checkbox"/> Jewish | <input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hindu | <input type="checkbox"/> Korean | <input type="checkbox"/> White American |



Promoting Understanding ³⁴

Class Time Needed: 40 minutes

Materials

- Newsprint or butcher paper
- Markers
- Sticky notes

Objectives

- Students will understand the difference between categories and stereotypes.
- Students will identify ways to respond to the stereotypes they hear.

Introduction

In *Teaching About Cultural Awareness*, Gary Smith and George Otero point out an important difference between categorizing and stereotyping.

*Because of the amount of information we have to assimilate, categorizing is necessary. It is a way to reduce and simplify an otherwise impossibly complex world. Stereotypes . . . go beyond the functionality of thinking in categories. They are beliefs about people in categories that lessen the chances of interaction and diminish the potential for recognizing and accepting differences.*³⁵

This activity is designed to help students understand the negative consequences of stereotyping. Follow-up activities provide opportunities to work together to find ways to confront stereotypes.

Procedure

1. Post several sections of newsprint or butcher paper around the classroom. List one category at the top of each sheet of paper. Some possible categories are listed below, but feel free to adapt this list to make it relevant to your students.

Girls	Asians
Boys	Gays/Lesbians
Athletes	Native Americans
Honor Roll Students	Biracial/Multiracial
Cheerleaders	Disabled
Blacks/African Americans	Various Religious Groups
Whites/European Americans	Elderly
Hispanics/Latinos	Young

2. Present or review the terms “category” and “stereotype.” Point out that categories help us organize the information we have about people, places, and things. For example, it makes sense to describe someone whose ancestors lived in North America well before 1492 as a Native American. But if we assume that person has certain characteristics because he or she belongs to that category, then we are stereotyping. Stereotypes ignore individual differences and assume that all of the people in a given category are alike.

3. Have students look at the posted categories and, using sticky notes, write down stereotypes they have heard about these groups of people. Then have students place the notes under the appropriate categories.

4. After everyone has finished, give students the opportunity to look at the stereotypes posted under each category. Then move to the debriefing session.

Debriefing

Use the following questions to guide student discussion about stereotypes.

1. Were any stereotypes posted about groups or categories that you belong to? How did it feel to see them “in print”?
2. Where do these stereotypes come from? How are they perpetuated?
3. Were positive as well as negative stereotypes posted? Why should positive stereotypes be avoided?
4. What did you learn from this activity? Is there any group that is free of stereotypes?
5. What if there were no stereotypes? Do you think people would behave differently toward one another?
6. Suppose your best friend believes that all the stereotypes about a certain group are true. How would you deal with that situation? What are some things we can do to avoid perpetuating stereotypes?

Extending the Ideas

- Make a list on a flip chart of categories that students in the room fall into, such as African American, Hispanic, Chinese American, band members, honor roll students, cheerleaders. (Be sure that each category will apply to at least two students.) As you go through the list, have the students identify each group to which he or she belongs. Point out that even though each person belongs to many groups, for the purposes of this exercise, students will focus on one group. Then divide the class into several small groups, e.g. a group of Baptists, a group of Chinese Americans. In each group, have students list stereotypes that are commonly applied to the group and facts that dispel the stereotypes. Then have each group present its list to the entire class.
- After all groups have presented their lists, ask the class to brainstorm what they could do to help reduce these stereotypes. For examples, refer to the activity “Fighting Words with Words.” For practice, individuals can role-play what they would say or do if they experienced being stereotyped or hearing someone stereotype others. Emphasize the use of nonaccusatory language when confronting stereotypes.
- Work with your students to make a list of current popular movies or songs. Discuss the plots or lyrics. Ask the students to work independently to examine these for stereotypes. After a few minutes have them bring their findings to a cooperative group, discuss these, and rank the list for the number of stereotypes depicted. Compare all the groups’ rankings and come up with a class consensus. Then pose the question: “Based on these findings, what further action can we take to reduce the use of stereotypes?” This could develop into a service-learning project. See the Service-Learning Rubric printed in the introduction to this guide.

