

How Biased Are You?: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 7-12

Curriculum Focus: Contemporary Studies

Lesson Duration: Three class periods

Program Description

Racial prejudice, or bias, is easily recognized in its extreme forms, but it infiltrates everyday life in subtle, unintentional ways, also. Discover just how common bias is as hidden cameras follow real-life adults as they interact with people of different races.

Onscreen Questions

Before watching the video

- Think about the meanings of the words “bias” and “prejudice.” Discuss your attitudes toward people who are different or look different from you. What do you think are the sources of prejudice?
- As you watch, think about situations that could plant seeds of prejudice in a young child. Is anyone immune to developing racial prejudice?

After watching the video

- Evaluate the validity of the tests that you saw administered in the program. Can people have racial prejudice and not know it?
 - Do you feel that the tests were fair?
 - Were they successful in revealing true racial biases? Explain your answers.
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Understand how assumptions can lead to stereotypes and unfair judgments about individuals and groups.
- Understand how stereotypes and biases affect our lives.

Materials

- Writing paper
- Flip chart and/or large sheets of paper
- Magic markers

Procedures

Day #1: Stereotypes in School

1. Begin by discussing how people often assign labels or categories to describe others and how these labels may be based on such things as clothing and appearance or a person's speech or religious affiliation. It is a natural human inclination to categorizing people or objects. However, people often make assumptions about people based on little or no information.
2. Ask students to brainstorm labels that are used to categorize groups of people at school, such as "jocks" or "brains." Write each label on the board, and then have students narrow the list to five labels that make up major categories.
3. Write the five categories on five separate flip-chart sheets and post them around the room. Allow students to spend 10-15 minutes to travel to each sheet, where they will try to write as many adjectives as possible that describe each of the categories. Remind students that they should add only new words to the list.
4. When they are finished, ask students to take a moment and look at the adjectives under each category. Use the following questions to lead a discussion about what they recorded.
 - Do assumptions apply to everyone in a group?
 - Do most people share the same assumptions about members of a group? Why do you think that is?
 - Do assumptions tell us anything factual about an individual within a group?
 - How do assumptions affect your behavior toward others?
5. Now ask students to help define the word "stereotype." Explain that when we make assumptions about an entire group of people, those assumptions are referred to as stereotypes. When assumptions and stereotypes influence our actions, it becomes difficult to make an unbiased, or fair, judgment. This influenced judgment is called a "bias."
6. Take another look at the adjectives recorded and hold a class discussion around the following questions: Are these adjectives stereotypes? Are any adjectives unfair or hurtful?

Day #2: Racial Stereotypes

1. Begin with a discussion about the concepts of race and ethnicity. Write each word on the board or on a flip chart and ask students to list the attributes that define the terms race and ethnicity. Record their ideas. Next, ask students for the names of five different racial or ethnic groups.
2. Prepare five sheets of flip-chart paper. At the top of each sheet, write the name of one group the students named.
3. Divide the class into five groups and supply each student in the class with a marker.
4. Give each group one of the five sheets of paper. Give students three minutes to list as many common stereotypes as possible about the group of people at the top of the sheet. Remind students that they should list common stereotypes – not those they necessarily believe.

5. When students are finished, rotate the sheets of paper between groups, so that each group works on another sheet, adding new stereotypes to the list. Rotate every three minutes until each group has worked on every sheet.
6. Post the sheets in class where everyone can see them; give students five minutes to read the sheets.
7. Conclude the lesson with a discussion of the exercise, asking students the following questions:
 - How do the stereotypes listed by the class make you feel?
 - What do you notice about the stereotypes? (There may be good and bad assumptions, many stereotypes for different groups, or shared stereotypes among different groups.)
 - Where have you seen these stereotypes portrayed? (Television, movies, magazines, books, and newspapers?)
 - How do you think a stereotype might cause someone to behave in a biased way toward another person?

Day #3: Experiencing Bias

1. Before class begins, post in the classroom the ten pieces of chart paper generated during the first two class lessons that deal with assumptions and stereotypes in school and in society.
2. Now ask students to spend 15-20 minutes writing about a personal experience concerning bias. Tell students not to put their names on the papers. Students may write about a situation in which they were a victim of bias or one in which they witnessed bias.
3. Start by sharing this prompt with the class: Think about a situation where someone made a biased judgment about you or acted unfairly toward you because of your age, skin color, clothes, gender, speech, neighborhood, family finances, or some other reason.
4. Ask students to consider the following questions before they begin to write:
 - How did you determine that you were being unfairly judged?
 - What terms or actions were directed at you due to assumptions or stereotypes?
 - Why do you think those assumptions were made about you?
 - How did the experience make you feel?
 - How do you think you should have been treated in that situation?
5. When students are finished, have them pass their papers to the front of the room. Shuffle the papers and pass them back to the class, making sure no students have his or her own paper. Have each student read the experience of a classmate.

6. For homework, make the following assignment:

Identifying Stereotypes in the Media

Note any stereotypes you see over the next several days as you watch television programs, commercials, or movies. Use the following questions to lead you through your analysis:

- Do members of one group play similar roles over and over again?
- Are there any specific similarities shown between the people who portray “bad guys” and those who play “good guys”?
- Who plays the lead roles and who plays supporting roles?
- How do characteristics of language, such as accents, shape your feelings about different characters?
- Are there any groups of people you are not seeing in these media?

7. Over the course of several days, students will use this chart to keep a log of stereotypes they notice in common media. Students should record the title of the program or movie or the product advertised in the commercial; the group stereotyped; the stereotype portrayed; and any thoughts the student has about the stereotypes. Explain that this exercise might not be as easy as it looks. Many of us are so accustomed to seeing some stereotypes that we don't even notice them. Encourage students to look for patterns.

| Date | Type of Media | Group Stereotyped | Stereotype portrayed | Your Thoughts |
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Assessment

This lesson is designed to effect attitudes and receptiveness to new ideas, aspects likely to be immeasurable by traditional assessment methods. Teachers should look for students' willingness to participate, openness to new ideas, and their level of empathy toward targets of bias and discrimination. It is important that the basic principles of this lesson — freedom from bias and stereotypes — are interwoven into the classroom environment throughout the year. Changing biased attitudes requires continual reinforcement.



Vocabulary

assumption

Definition: An idea that is taken for granted but not necessarily proven

Context: Some people make the assumption that all Asians are smart.

bias

Definition: Attitudes or behaviors based on stereotypes of groups of people

Context: When we omit people of color in our history lessons, we display a bias that their contributions are not important.

ethnicity

Definition: A way in which people are categorized according to what we believe to be shared culture, language, and geographic region

Context: Italians, Irish, and many other groups celebrate their ethnicity by holding festivals and parades

race

Definition: A way in which we categorize people based on what we believe to be shared biological traits such as skin color, hair texture, and eye shape

Context: One function of the U.S. Census is to count the citizens of this country by race, such as black, white, or Native American.

stereotype

Definition: A generalized picture of a person or a group

Context: A stereotype depicts people in a group as having the same characteristics.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link:

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

This lesson plan addresses the following national standard:

- Behavioral Studies – Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>



This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture and Cultural Diversity
 - Individual Development and Identity
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>

