

LESSON 4

Stereotypes

Goal

To examine how people develop stereotypes and to consider how stereotypes can lead to prejudice.

Materials

Paper, pencil, chalkboard or chart paper

Key Words and Phrases

Stereotype, prejudice, assumption, generalization

Process

1. Tell students that you will be reading a series of words. Instruct students to write each word on a sheet of notebook, followed by the first thought that comes to mind when they think of a person in that role. Encourage students not to censor their responses.
2. Read the following words aloud, one by one, allowing enough time after reading each word for students to write their first thoughts:

cheerleader	construction worker
grandmother	doctor
teacher	librarian
gang member	athlete
honor roll student	nurse
dancer	

3. After students have completed this lesson, have them turn the paper face down on their desks until it's time to review the responses.
4. Have the class select two words from the original list, such as construction worker and cheerleader. Divide students into small groups of three or four students per group. Assign half of the groups the first selected word and the other groups the second selected word. Give groups four or five minutes to list as many characteristics as possible of their assigned word. When they have completed the task, generate a list of all responses on the chalkboard or chart paper.

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5. Discuss the accuracy of the characteristics; have students consider whether all cheerleaders, for example, are blond or if all construction workers are men. Have students consider which of the characteristics listed under each name could be considered *assumptions* – ideas that we believe are true without verification.
 6. Provide students with the following definition of stereotype:

A *stereotype* is an oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences. Even seemingly positive stereotypes that link a person or group to a specific positive trait can have negative consequences.

7. Based on the definition of stereotype, have students consider whether the assumptions that they made about cheerleaders and construction workers can cause people to develop stereotypes about these two groups.

Have them also consider how even the positive characteristics can have negative consequences (e.g., if people hold the stereotype that all cheerleaders are honor students, then someone who is an average student may not feel qualified to participate).

8. Instruct students to turn over the papers containing their initial impressions of the categories listed on the board. Have them review their lists and then consider the following questions:
 - a. Based on the discussion about assumptions and stereotypes, are you reconsidering any of your responses? Do any of your responses appear to be a result of unconscious stereotypes that you have formed about particular groups?
 - b. Do you think that if we tallied the responses to each of the items listed, the answers would be similar? Why or why not?
 - c. How do people learn stereotypes?
 - d. What were some examples of stereotypes that people responded to after the terrorist attacks on 9/11?
 - e. What are some ways that people can verify whether or not an assumption that they have about a group of people is accurate? What would be the value of doing so?
9. Close this lesson by having students think about a stereotype that is held about a group to which they belong. Ask students to share their ideas on this topic in small group discussion. Alternatively, ask students to prepare a short reflective writing piece on this topic. Encourage students to consider the following in their discussion/writing:
 - the stereotype that is commonly held about their group;
 - their feelings upon hearing this stereotype;
 - ways that the stereotype limits or hurts them or others who belong to the group;

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- ways that people might learn new information so as not to ignore individual differences that might exist among members of the group.

Parts of this lesson adapted from *Opening the Door to Diversity: Voices from the Middle School (Resource Guide)*. 1999. Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.

Connection to Standards

Language Arts: Listening and Speaking

- Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

Language Arts: Writing

- Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process
- Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing
- Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions

Life Skills: Thinking and Reasoning

- Understands and applies basic principles of logic and reasoning

Civics

- Understands the importance of Americans sharing and supporting certain values, beliefs, and principles of American constitutional democracy
- Understands the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs, and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society

Behavioral Standards

- Understands various meanings of social group, general implications of group membership, and different ways that groups function