

UNCOVERING STEREOTYPES



AGENDA

- Starter
- Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover
- Common Ground
- Walk a Mile in Their Shoes
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

Objectives

Students will define stereotypes as misleading generalizations.

Students will discover common ground with people they assume they won't like.

Students will explain the importance of dispelling stereotypes and considering the individual.

Materials Needed

- Pictures of movie stars, with a list of movies they've been in and the roles they played (Starter)
- Five brown paper bags numbered one through five, each with a different item inside, including one with a dollar bill (Other items might include a pack of pencils, a dictionary, a piece of pound cake, cookies, rubber bands, etc.) (Part I)
- Pen and slip of paper for each student (Part II)
- Pen and index card for each student (Part III)

Starter (3 minutes)

Before class, display pictures of well-known movie stars who are currently popular. Elicit from students the titles of movies these stars were in and the roles they played. Write responses under the pictures. Ask students to describe the stars' personalities; then, ask if they personally know any of these famous people.

Explain to students that "typecasting" is assigning actors to play certain roles again and again because those are the roles in which audiences love to see them. Provide examples, such as Tom Hanks usually portraying the "good guy" in movies. Point out that once an actor begins to play similar roles in every movie, we begin to make assumptions about their real personality. Most people base their beliefs about actors on the roles they play.

Tell students that stereotypes are similar to the assumptions that people make about a star's real personality based on the roles they play in movies. Stereotypes are assumptions about people based on little information.

Part I Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover (10 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize that stereotypes are misleading generalizations.

1. Students recognize misleading preconceptions.

Ask for five volunteers. Have each volunteer choose one of the brown paper bags with an item inside. Tell the students that they are not to open up the bags until you tell them to do so.

Once all five students have chosen a bag, tell them that they are going to get one chance to trade their bag for another or to keep the one that they have. Allow the student who was last to choose a bag the opportunity to trade first. Continue in reverse order until each of the five volunteers has had a chance to trade.

Ask the volunteers to share their feelings about the bag that they are holding. Elicit from the rest of the class their opinions about what might be in the bags.

Ask the volunteers why they chose to trade or keep their bags. Allow them to look in their bags and again share their feelings about it.

2. Students define stereotypes as misleading generalizations.

Discuss the judgments that were made before opening the bags and the different emotions that those judgments aroused.

Ask students to identify the generalizations that drove their thinking about the contents of the bags. For example, students might say that heavy items are more valuable than light items or that items that rattle are broken.

Point out to students that, based on the real contents of the bags, some of their first reactions were unjustified. Explain to students that stereotypes are similar generalizations about people that can have the same effect, misleading us and our reactions to people.

3. Students define “stereotype.”

Ask students to define the word “stereotype.” (Students might respond: people or things conforming to a type; a generalization about a group of people.) Have a volunteer look up “stereotype” in the dictionary. Write student responses where everyone can see. Guide students to recognize that stereotypes are oversimplifications and ignore the fact that people are uniquely different from each other.

Ask students how they think stereotypes might play a role in some interpersonal conflicts. (Students might respond: making judgments about people based on little information increases the likelihood of having a misunderstanding; preconceptions can be misleading; if we have preconceptions, we may not hear exactly what a person is saying to us.)

Part II Common Ground (30 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize the need to look for common ground in conflict situations and with people they assume they won't like.

1. Students create a list of rival groups from pop culture, literature, and history.

Distribute pens and slips of paper to students. Ask students to brainstorm a list of groups that they know are famous for their rivalry. Encourage students to think about groups in pop culture and groups that they've studied in subjects such as English literature or world history. Prompt students by providing at least one example that they may be familiar with, like the Montagues and the Capulets from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the Jedi and the Sith from *Star Wars*, the Allied forces and the Axis powers in World War II, the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters from the *Harry Potter* series, or the Autobots and the Decepticons from *Transformers*.

Collect the lists and place the names of the rival groups inside an empty bag or container. Shake the bag or container, and then randomly pick out the names of two rival groups. Divide students into two equal groups and have them sit on opposite sides of the room, facing each other. Assign each group one of the names you drew.

Explain that the groups will be addressing each other as rivals, like the groups they have listed.

2. Students create lists of their own likes and dislikes.

Distribute one index card or piece of paper to each student in both groups. Ask students to make a list of likes and dislikes for each of the following categories: food, clothing, hobbies, places, and TV shows. (Depending on your time constraint, you may choose to add or omit categories.)

Give each group time to discuss their likes and dislikes within their group and to form a group trait based on the things they have most in common. For example, one group may identify themselves as “pizza lovers” or “star athletes.”

Remind each group to see the opposing team as the “enemy.” Ask each group to come up with one reason why they would not like each other or get along.

3. Students find common ground with an opposing group by analyzing similar likes and dislikes.

Tell students that they will take turns with students from their opposing group, reading aloud one of their likes and dislikes. Explain to students that when they hear a like or dislike they agree with, they should raise their hands. Assign one student from each group to be a record keeper. Each record keeper will keep a tally of the number of students from the opposing group who agree with a like or dislike named by the record keeper’s own group.

Have students begin reading their lists. Continue in this manner until most students have had a chance to share one of their likes or dislikes.

4. Students discuss why finding common ground is important.

Ask students to reconvene with their groups and discuss the end results of their tallies. Ask them to examine and discuss how much they have in common with their “enemy group.”

Ask students:

- In which categories did you expect to have the least in common? What about the most in common?
- Were you surprised by the total number of shared interests you had with the opposing group? Why or why not?
- How does this activity relate to the ways people form opinions about a person or group of people?

Point out to students that their “warring” groups behaved similarly to the way people act when they believe stereotypes. Explain that sometimes people claim not to like someone in a group based on false preconceptions or misguided beliefs.

Ask students to suggest some ideas on how people can look beyond superficial stereotypes and find common ground with people who appear to be very different. Lead students to understand that challenging themselves to find commonalities with each other can help them improve communication and resolve conflicts.

Part III Walk a Mile in Their Shoes (20 minutes)

Purpose: Students confront and dispel stereotypes about various groups of people.

1. Students examine stereotypes.

Give each student a pen and an index card. Ask students to create a list of at least three generalizations about various groups of people that they have read, heard, or seen. Let students know that their cards will remain anonymous and that they do not have to agree with their listed generalizations. Remind students to use school-appropriate language.

Have students write the stereotypes on their index cards in the following format: "I've heard that (group of people) are all (generalization/stereotype)."

Ask students to turn their index cards over once they have completed their lists. Collect and shuffle the index cards; then, randomly distribute one to every student.

Allow students a few minutes to read their new cards silently.

While this is a serious and sensitive topic, expect the class to laugh when appropriate, as well as to experience the various feelings and hurt that these stereotypes can evoke in people.

Ask students to take turns reading the stereotypes aloud to the class.

2. Students experience stereotypes and labels.

Divide students into groups of five. Have each group create a three-minute nonverbal skit that uses at least two of the stereotypes written on their index cards. The skits should show the effect that these stereotypes can have.

Have each group perform its skit in front of the class. Remind students that they may not speak when performing, but they are allowed to make sounds or alter their appearance (e.g., hum a song, take off accessories, etc.). Tell them to be mindful of their facial expressions and body language when communicating with each other.

After each group's performance, ask the class to respond to the following questions:

- Describe the ways that the characters interacted with each other.
- How did the actors portray the story without speaking?
- What emotions did they express in their actions?
- Based on your observations, what stereotypes were depicted in the group's skit? How did these stereotypes affect the characters?

Explain to the class that anyone can be stereotyped and that one of the best ways to dispel a stereotype is to be aware of the stereotype, how others perceive you, and how you choose to see others. Ask students to generate positive suggestions for ways to foresee stereotypes that they may form about someone and strategies that they can use to see beyond their own assumptions.

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students how dispelling stereotypes can help reduce interpersonal conflicts. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Stereotypes are misleading generalizations that ignore the fact that every person is a unique individual.
- Looking for common ground with someone in a conflict situation can help us to ease tension by recognizing the other person's needs.
- Focusing on people's strengths rather than superficial, stereotyped traits creates stronger, more positive relationships and reduces conflict.

Student Assessment

1. Why can stereotypes be harmful?
2. What stereotype has been used to describe you or one of your friends? How is this stereotype simplistic or inaccurate?
3. How can you see past stereotypes and find common ground with someone who is different from you?

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Using Quotations

“What we see depends mainly on what we’re looking for.”

Have students discuss the danger in looking for characteristics that confirm stereotypes.

Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

Before class, hide the titles of a variety of books under pieces of paper. Have students look at the covers and make assumptions about the books. Ask students to discuss why they made the assumptions that they did. Discuss the proverb “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”

Have students write their own proverbs that warn of the dangers of stereotypes.

Writing in Your Journal

Tell students to reflect on a time when they felt that they had been stereotyped.

Have students write about a time that they know they let stereotypes dictate their behavior toward someone.

Using Technology

Show students commercials that play on stereotypes (e.g., women wash laundry, men play sports).

Have students identify the stereotypes.

Have students write business letters to the companies whose products are being advertised and propose changes to the commercials.

Homework

Have students play word association games with two people outside of the class. Tell students that they are to name a group and tell the person to say the first thing that comes to their mind.

Ask students to share the answers that their subjects gave. Have students discuss their reactions to what their subjects said.

Additional Resources

Have students read and discuss an article from *Learning for Justice*, an online magazine and website published each spring and fall.

To obtain the magazine, visit www.learningforjustice.org.