

AVOIDING STEREOTYPES



AGENDA

- Starter
- Not All Exactly the Same
- What Stereotypes Do
- Getting It Right
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

Objectives

Students define “stereotyping.”

Students analyze the effects of applying stereotypes to people.

Students identify ways to avoid stereotyping others.

Materials Needed

- Pen and one index card for each student (Part II)
- One copy of the “Perceptions” activity sheet for each student (Part III)

Starter (3 minutes)

Begin class by casually holding a whiteboard eraser as you ask students to raise their hands if they agree with this statement: “Erasers are [say the color of the eraser you are holding].” Ask students who do not have their hands raised to explain why they disagree with the statement. Guide students to conclude that not all erasers are used to clean whiteboards. Some are used to clean pencil markings off paper. These erasers are made of a different material and come in many colors.

Say, “Your response depended on what kind of eraser you thought I was talking about—it depended on your perception of what an eraser is. I influenced your perception by holding a whiteboard eraser. Today, we’re going to talk about people’s perceptions of one another and how they are formed.”

Part I Not All Exactly the Same (10 minutes)

Purpose: Students consider an analogy in order to understand the concept of stereotyping.

1. Students describe a common object.

Invite students to describe a pencil. (You may choose another common object, such as an apple, a banana, a folder, or a notebook.) Write students’ responses on the board. Focus on general descriptive words and phrases, such as “long,” “skinny,” “lead point at one end,” “eraser at the other end,” and so on. If students describe specific characteristics, such as color or material, list these as well.

2. Students challenge their descriptions.

Ask students to hold up their own pencils. Choose a distinctive one, such as a mechanical pencil, and ask the student holding it to stand up and show it to everyone. Ask whether this pencil fits the description on the board or whether anything should be added or changed in order to make the description more exact.

Follow this same procedure with other pencils that differ from the description in some way. When you’ve done this a number of times, invite students to draw conclusions about this exercise. Affirm responses that point out the following:

- There are obviously many different kinds of pencils.
- It is difficult to come up with one description that covers the individual characteristics of every single pencil.

3. Students recognize the concept of stereotyping.

Reinforce that as more examples and information became available, the class recognized that there were many differences among individual members of the same group. That made it hard to come up with one description or definition that fit them all.

Ask students to develop a description that could include all of the pencils. Afterward, emphasize that students had to come up with a very broad and general list of things that did not include the specific or individual characteristics of every member of the group. Tell students that such a description or definition is an example of a stereotype.

Part II What Stereotypes Do (25 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 stereotypes about various groups of people that they have read or heard about, or have seen. Let students know that their cards will remain anonymous, and that they do not have to agree with the stereotypes they write. Remind students to use appropriate language.

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

Ask students for their index cards 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 identify labels as stereotypes.

When students have finished reading their index cards, ask:

- How did the stereotypes we read make you feel?
- Do you think the stereotypes we read are true?
- Do you think some people treat each other differently because of stereotypes like these?

Point out that using labels for someone can be dangerous, because you're not really responding to the person—you're only responding to a label, or a stereotype.

Explain that stereotypes result from trying to understand a very complex world by focusing on general similarities among people—like the class's description of the pencils. Stereotypes cause problems because they make you overlook the differences among people.

3. Students recognize problems with stereotypes.

Ask students to raise their hands if they have ever been treated a certain way because of a stereotype. Then, ask for a show of hands from people who have treated someone else a certain way because of a stereotype. Pause briefly before making the following points:

- People sometimes use stereotypes to make judgments about another person without finding out who the other person really is.
- Believing stereotypes fools people into thinking that they know what someone else is like just because the person looks a certain way, does a certain thing, or hangs out with certain people.
- Stereotypes can also stop people from forming an accurate opinion, as they don't take time to learn the facts.

4. Students find ways to avoid stereotypes.

Challenge students to offer suggestions that can help us avoid stereotyping others. Prompt students to generate a list of suggestions, such as the following:

- Don't make a judgment about a person or a situation until you have the facts.
- Focus on individuals and their strengths and interests.
- Make an effort to get to know other people, and let them get to know you.
- Remember that if you think you know someone because they fit a general category or description, then you may be stereotyping the person. Everyone is unique, even if they have a lot in common with a larger group.

Challenge students to offer suggestions on how to avoid being stereotyped by others. Prompt students to generate a list of suggestions, such as the following:

- Focus on your strengths and interests, and make them stand out so that they are what people notice about you.
- Volunteer information about yourself.
- Volunteer to do things or talk with people you don't know very well.

Part III Getting It Right (10 minutes)

Purpose: Students analyze the importance of gathering information before making judgments about people.

1. Set up the activity.

Divide the class into groups of four. Ask each group of students to arrange themselves in alphabetical order by their first names. The student whose name is closest to the letter A will be the group leader.

2. Students write their perceptions.

Explain that all students are to write one fact about themselves on a piece of paper and hand it to the leader. Caution students to write something about themselves that they are comfortable sharing with the group.

Distribute copies of the “Perceptions” activity sheet. Explain that each group’s leader will read aloud the facts one by one, while the rest of the group uses the worksheet to write their guesses about which classmate is described by that fact.

3. Students check their perceptions.

Ask the group leaders to read the facts again. This time, students should indicate which facts they submitted. Students can then complete their activity sheets.

When students have completed their activity sheets, facilitate a class discussion about the accuracy of students’ perceptions. Use questions such as the following to prompt the discussion:

- Did you correctly match the facts to your fellow students?
- How did you feel when you guessed incorrectly?
- How did it feel when someone guessed incorrectly about you?
- Can you think of a situation in which guessing incorrectly could be embarrassing?
- Did anyone answer “I don’t know” for the person being described?

Point out that unless students really knew the people they were guessing about, they probably weren’t sure which facts were true about which people. Explain that when they’re not familiar with a person, admitting that they don’t know all of the facts is better than making a guess based on a label or on other incomplete information.

Conclusion *(2 minutes)*

Ask students to explain the effects of stereotyping. Ask them to identify ways to avoid stereotyping others. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Stereotypes often give people false perceptions of one another.
- Never rely on stereotypes to make judgments about people or situations.
- To avoid stereotyping others, take the time to find out the facts.
- To avoid being stereotyped, focus attention on yourself as an individual.

Student Assessment

1. Define “stereotype.”
2. List three reasons why stereotypes can be harmful.
3. List three things you can do to avoid using stereotypes.

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Using Quotations

“What we see depends mainly on what we look for.”

Divide the class into small groups. Assign different groups the belief that dogs make better pets than cats, and vice versa. Have students list reasons to support their assigned points of view. Have the class share their reasons and discuss characteristics that are open to interpretation (such as “independent” or “needs lots of exercise”). Relate this to how our beliefs about others are open to interpretation.

Using Technology

Search www.youtube.com for videos about the stereotypes different groups have faced in the United States. Some of the videos may contain images of violence or strong language; be sure to screen videos for appropriateness before showing them. Show the videos to the class. Then, discuss the impact that stereotypes had on the people shown.

Writing in Your Journal

Have students write about an encounter with someone who’s not in their “group.” (This could include a person of a different age, race, ethnicity, or gender.) Have volunteers share their work.

Using Technology

Have students exchange emails with pen pals from another region or country. One possible source is www.epals.com. Registration requires a teacher or supervisory adult. The site includes safety tips. Have the class create a before-and-after chart comparing their ideas about a place before and after they got to know some of its residents.

Homework

Have students watch a TV program or movie showing interactions between people of different cultures. Have students write a one-paragraph summary or review, with emphasis on how the program addressed stereotypes.

Additional Resources

Show students the following video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIh0DnFUGsk. Ask volunteers to share something about themselves that doesn't adhere to gender stereotypes.

PERCEPTIONS

I think the fact describes _____

because _____

Was I correct? ☐ Yes ☐ No

The fact actually describes _____

I think the fact describes _____

because _____

Was I correct? ☐ Yes ☐ No

The fact actually describes _____

I think the fact describes _____

because _____

Was I correct? ☐ Yes ☐ No

The fact actually describes _____

I think the fact describes _____

because _____

Was I correct? ☐ Yes ☐ No

The fact actually describes _____