

For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights

Pre-Visit Character Education: Understanding Stereotypes

Grades: 5-12

Time required: one class period

Materials:

- **Chalk board or dry erase board**
- **Chalk/markers**
- **Stereotyping, Prejudice and Discrimination *In Focus* worksheet (optional)**

Student Instruction:

1. Begin a discussion about stereotyping by asking your students the following question, “What is a stereotype?” Create a word web on the board as students offer their definitions.
2. Explain that **stereotypes** are when people use labels or categories to describe a group of people, and often times these descriptions are based on exterior qualities, like the way a person looks, acts, or talks. While this is a natural human inclination to characterize people as we seek to understand them, it has the potential to be harmful. Ask students how defining a group of people by exterior qualities can potentially be harmful. The class should arrive at a conclusion that broadly defining a group of people can force a person to make assumptions about every person that may or may not belong to that group. Making assumptions about people can then affect our behavior and attitudes toward that person. Negative assumptions can also lead to injustice and mistreatment. *Ask students if they can name a few historical examples of stereotypes leading to injustice.*
3. Next, begin listing groups of people on the board that would be familiar to your students (*at this point, omitting racial groups*). Include the following groups: teachers, athletes, women, men, teenagers, and celebrities. Ask them to list descriptive characteristics about each group or ways that they have heard this group of people described. Follow the group description list with the questions:
 - How does it make you feel when you read these adjectives?
 - What do you notice about this list?
 - How have you seen these stereotypes portrayed?
4. Begin a discussion about how people from different racial and ethnic groups can also be stereotyped. You will then conduct the same activity as above, but students will do this privately on individual sheets of paper. Ask them to write down five different racial or ethnic groups on their paper (examples can include but certainly are not limited to: African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, people of Middle Eastern decent, and European (or Caucasian) Americans.) They should take 2-3 minutes listing adjectives for each group.
5. Follow the activity with the same questions as above, with one addition:

- How does it make you feel when you read these adjectives?
 - What do you notice about this list?
 - How have you seen these stereotypes portrayed?
 - How can these stereotypes lead to mistreatment of the person or injustice for an entire group of people?
6. Next, inform your students that they will be visiting an exhibit at their local museum called *For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights*. Some of the first object and images that they will see represent negative, harmful **stereotypes** (thoughts, assumptions or statements) of African Americans. In fact, the objects and images in the exhibit go beyond stereotypes and can also be classified as **prejudice**. Ask them to clarify the difference between **stereotype**, which is an oversimplified statement or assumption, and a **prejudice**. **Prejudice** is an affective (feeling) state – where attitudes and opinions are actively formed about stereotypes. Prejudice can then lead to **discrimination**, which is the action (behavior) or treatment that follows a prejudice.
7. During their visit to the exhibit, ask students to record at least two examples of images, objects, quotes, or video that they observe that demonstrate **stereotyping**, **prejudice**, and **discrimination**. Students can use the worksheet that follows to complete this activity.

For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights
Stereotyping, Prejudice and Discrimination In Focus

<p>Stereotyping: an oversimplification of thoughts, assumptions or statements about a group of persons.</p> <p><i>Example: Diane is a girl so she is probably _____.</i></p>	<p>Example from exhibit (image, quote, objects, video):</p>	<p>Example from exhibit (image, quote, objects, video):</p>
<p>Prejudice: attitudes and opinions formed about members of a group (based on stereotypes.)</p> <p><i>Example: "I can't stand athletes because they are all so _____."</i></p>	<p>Example from exhibit (image, quote, objects, video):</p>	<p>Example from exhibit (image, quote, objects, video):</p>
<p>Discrimination: behavior, action, or treatment that is the result of prejudice.</p> <p><i>Example: "I will not employ any people of color in my company."</i></p>	<p>Example from exhibit (image, quote, objects, video):</p>	<p>Example from exhibit (image, quote, objects, video):</p>

Post-Visit Character Education: Facing Stereotypes

Grades: 5-12

Time required: one class period

Special Note: The following exercise may elicit some intense emotions. It is advised that you split your class into smaller groups to conduct this activity. You might also try splitting up males and females. **Require** that what happens during this activity remain confidential. You can also ask the group to come up with their own group rules/agreements that will govern the potentially controversial discussion. Good examples of these kinds of rules are as follows:

- **Respect other people**
- **Everyone's opinions are valuable**
- **Take turns sharing ideas**
- **Do not share what occurs during this time with others outside of the group**

Materials:

- **Pen/marker**
- **Mailing label/sticker, one for each participant**

Student Instruction:

1. Ask your students to recall their experience visiting *For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights*. Begin by asking them to recapitulate the “story” told in the exhibition. What did they observe about stereotypes? In what part of the exhibit did they witness prejudice? And in what part did they see the harmful effects of discrimination? How did they feel? You may wish to review their worksheets at this point.
2. Ask your students: “Even though the modern civil rights movement brought about equal rights under the law for African American citizens, did it put an end to discrimination?” Explore the idea that discrimination still exists, and ask students for examples. (Some examples you might cite: The unemployment rate for young African American men is over twice the rate for young white, Hispanic and Asian men; African American men are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. The percentage of young African American men in prison is nearly three times that of Hispanic men and nearly seven times that of white men. Nearly 4 out of 10 young African American men lack health insurance. Source: Kaiser Family Foundation)
3. Wonder aloud if discrimination exists in your school. While racial discrimination might be the most obvious form, suggest that discrimination also exists in the way that members of certain social groups (or cliques) are judged and treated. Create a listing of the social groups at your school that are often characterized in oversimplified ways (stereotypes). This list might include, but is not limited to: jocks, brains, nerds, emos, popular kids, goths, gays and lesbians, loners, clowns/comedians, etc.

4. Next, go through the list and write one social group on each mailing label/sticker. You may have to duplicate group names depending on the number of students. Without the student seeing the label you have randomly chosen, place the mailing sticker on their back. Each student should have one placed on their back.
5. Not knowing how they have been labeled, students will then proceed to interact with the labeled student based on the stereotypes and prejudices generally assigned to that group within your school. Since everyone is wearing a label, everyone will receive unique treatment. Other students are to treat the labeled student, perhaps in an exaggerated way, the way a member from that social group is typically treated in your school. From this interaction, the label-wearer is to guess their social group assignment.
6. Hold a debriefing of this experience. Debriefing (or processing) is just as important (or more) than the active portion of the lesson. Ask:
 - “What was it like to be treated based on a label or in this case, membership in a certain group?”
 - “How did it feel?”
 - “What was it like treating someone else based on an oversimplified statement of who they are?”
 - “Do you see this kind of behavior in our school?”
 - “How does it make you feel when you see it happen in reality?”
 - “What can you do when you see someone being treated unfairly?”
7. Finally, have each student take 15 – 20 minutes to quietly write a journal entry about their own experiences with stereotyping, prejudice, or discrimination. If they have not experienced this type of treatment, they can write about a time they observed someone else being treated unfairly.
8. In conclusion, inform your students that prejudice and stereotyping are LEARNED, and the good news is that they can therefore be UNLEARNED. The best way to combat stereotyping and prejudice is direct contact with the individual or group so that you can get to know them beyond categories. Instead of categorizing groups of people, we must work to get to know their *unique qualities as individuals*.
9. **Extension:** The Southern Poverty Law Center’s Initiative “Mix It Up at Lunch” is a great way to put this activity into school-wide action. This campaign to teach tolerance is based on the finding that “students have identified the cafeteria as the place where divisions are most clearly drawn. So on one day – October 18 this school year – we ask students to move out of their comfort zones and connect with someone new over lunch.” You can find out more here: <http://www.tolerance.org/mix-it-up/get-started>
For even greater impact, have students explore the parallels and divergences between our ability to “Mix It Up at Lunch” in the 21st century and the Sit-Ins of the Civil Rights era. What has changed? Find out about those who bravely sat at lunch counters with African Americans in solidarity.