

## Assignment Discovery Online Curriculum

**Lesson Title:**

Understanding Stereotypes

**Grade Level:**

7-12, with adaptation for younger students

**Subject Area:**

Social Sciences, Anti-Bias Education

**Duration:**

Three class periods

**Objectives:**

Students will understand the following:

1. Assumptions can lead to stereotypes and unfair judgments about individuals and groups.
2. Stereotypes and biases affect our lives.

**Materials:**

- Writing paper
- Flip chart and/or large sheets of paper
- Magic markers
- Art supplies (construction paper, scissors, tape, glue, magazines to cut up, etc.)
- Take Home Activity Sheet: Identifying Stereotypes in the Media

**Procedures****Day #1: Stereotypes in School**

1. Begin by discussing with students how people often use labels or categories to describe others and how these labels can be based on such characteristics as clothing, looks, the way a person talks, or the groups to which he or she belongs. Explain that categorizing things or people is a natural human inclination; however, people often make assumptions about groups of people they don't even know.
2. Ask the class to brainstorm categories that are used at school to group people. Categories could include labels such as "jocks" or "brains." Write each category the class generates onto the board and then have students narrow that list down to five major categories.
3. Write these major categories onto five separate pieces of flip chart paper and post these around the room. Give the class 10-15 minutes to travel to each posted sheet and write down adjectives related to the category headings. Remind students that they should only add new descriptions to the list.

4. When they are finished, ask students to take a moment and look at the adjectives that the class has generated under each group heading. Use the following questions to lead a discussion about what they recorded:
  - Do assumptions apply to everyone in a group?
  - Do most people hold the same assumptions about a group? Why or why not?
  - Do assumptions tell us anything definite about a categorized individual?
  - 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 attitudes, we may find that making a fair judgement about someone or something is difficult. This influence on judgement is called a “bias.”
6. Take another look at the adjectives recorded and hold a class discussion around the following questions: Do these adjectives describe stereotypes? How can they be unfair or hurtful?

### **Day #2: Racial Stereotypes**

1. Begin with a discussion on 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 large sheets of paper (flip chart paper). At the top of each sheet, write the name of one of the groups that 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. Ask them to list as many stereotypes that are commonly used to describe the category of people written at the top of paper. Give students three minutes to complete the exercise. Emphasize that students should list stereotypes that they have heard, not ones that they necessarily believe to be true.
5. When they are finished, rotate the sheets of paper between groups so that each group works on a new sheet. Have them add any unlisted stereotype adjectives. Rotate every three minutes until every group has worked on every sheet.
6. Post the sheets in class where everyone can see them and give students five minutes to read the sheets.
7. Conclude the lesson with a discussion on the exercise, asking students the following:
  - How do the stereotypes recorded by the class make you feel?
  - What do you notice about the stereotypes listed? Be aware that the students may have listed good and bad adjectives, many stereotypes for different groups, or the same stereotypes for different groups.
  - Where have you seen these stereotypes portrayed? television programs, movies, magazines, books?
  - How do you think a stereotype might cause someone to act unfairly toward another person?

### **Day #3: Experiencing Bias**

1. Before class begins, post around the classroom the 10 pieces of paper generated about assumptions and stereotypes in school and society.
2. Ask students to spend 15-20 minutes writing about a personal experience with biased behavior. Emphasize to students that they should not put their names on their papers. They can share an experience in which they were a victim of biased behavior or in which they witnessed bias.
3. Prompt the class with the following: “Think about a situation when someone made a biased judgment about you or acted unfairly toward you because of your age, skin color, clothes you were wearing, gender, the way you speak, where you live, how much money your family has, or some other reason.”
4. Ask students to consider the following questions before they begin to write:
  - How did you know that you were being unfairly judged?
  - What words or actions were directed at you because of 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 out to the class, making sure no one person has their own paper. Have each student read the personal experience of a classmate.
6. Have the entire class create a collage by combining the posters from days one and two, the written personal experiences, and pictures and artwork that present how assumptions and stereotypes make them feel. To create these images, provide magazines, construction paper, paint, markers, glue, and scissors.
7. For homework, review the Take Home Activity Sheet: Identifying Stereotypes in the Media with the class. Over the course of several days, they will use this sheet to keep a log of stereotypes they notice in television shows, commercials, or movies. Students should record the name of the show, movie, or product advertised; the group stereotyped; the stereotype portrayed; and any thoughts or feelings the student experienced while watching the program. Explain that this exercise might not be as easy as it seems; many of us are so accustomed to seeing certain stereotypes that we don’t even notice them. Encourage students to look for patterns in the images they watch.

**Adaptation for younger students:**

Younger children may not have an understanding or awareness of the concepts of race and ethnicity as they operate in society. However, they can be introduced to the concepts of categorizing, making assumptions, and stereotyping by exploring gender bias in a one-day activity. Limit categories in the exercise to “boys” and “girls” and brainstorm with students a list of adjectives that come to mind when they think of either group. Work with students to define the word “assumption” and point to examples of assumptions from the student-generated lists for boys and girls. Students should take part in a free writing exercise on a personal experience when an assumption was made about them because of gender. Students can then create a collage that combines the student-generated assumptions relating to gender, their own personal experiences, and related newspaper and magazine clippings.

**Questions:**

1. What are stereotypes and how do they affect people's lives?
2. Can you think of any events in history that were influenced by stereotypes and biases?
3. How do people learn to make stereotypes? How might they unlearn them?
4. How can the media (newspapers, television, movies) help to reduce stereotyping?
5. Do you think certain groups are more subject to stereotyping than others? If so, why?
6. What do you think an individual can do to help reduce bias and stereotyping?

**Evaluation:**

This lesson is designed to affect attitudes and receptiveness to new ideas, which are learning outcomes unlikely to be measurable 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 and recognizing individuals—are interwoven into the classroom environment throughout the year. Changing attitudes around bias requires continual reinforcement.

**Extensions:****Timelines**

Have students create historical timelines showing important events in the histories of traditionally underrepresented groups. Timelines can be created on long rolls of paper or with software such as *TimeLiner*. Research can be done using encyclopedias, history books, and the Internet. Some good timeline Web sites include the following:

An African-American Chronology of Important Dates  
<http://www.english.vt.edu/~LIT/BWW/chronology.html>

Asian American Experience In The U.S.: A Chronological History: 1763-1992  
<http://www.askasia.org/image/maps/t000015.htm>

Welcome to the Chinese American History Time Line  
<http://www.itp.berkeley.edu/~asam121/timeline.html>

Timeline for Native American History  
<http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/k12/naha/natime.html>

A Short History of Immigration Laws  
<http://labweb.soemadison.wisc.edu/cni514/fall97/sumera/laws2.html>

Latino and Hispanic History  
<http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/history.learn-teach/LatinoPage.htm>

## **Suggested Readings:**

### **What Are You? Voices of Mixed-Race Young People**

Pearl Fuyo Gaskins, Henry Holt and Company, 1999.

Society tries to define race, even if genetics can't. But even society has a hard time finding the right "niche" to put racially-mixed people into. The author interviewed eighty mixed-race teens about how they're treated by both halves of their heritage, and how they've shaped their own identity by either embracing society's view of who they are, or by trying to define themselves.

### **Us and Them: A History of Intolerance in America**

Jim Carnes, Oxford University Press, 1996.

From the days of the earliest European arrivals on our continent to the present day, prejudice and intolerance have played an ugly part in the lives of many of our country's citizens. This book takes a close look at more than a dozen examples of prejudice. A few are well-known, but most are smaller, more personal incidents that have never made the history textbooks. Maps, sidebars containing quotations from those who were there, and a wealth of photographs and illustrations bring the text to life.

## **Web Links:**

### **Hate and Violence: No simple answers**

Take an online test developed by the University of Washington and Yale to reveal unconscious attitudes that could affect how you interact with people of a different race. Be sure to explore the poll commissioned by the Discovery Channel and TIME Magazine examining teen violence at the bottom of the page.

<http://www.discovery.com/stories/history/hateviolence/tunein.html>

### **Southern Poverty Law Center**

An extensive collection of resources for teaching tolerance in the classroom.

<http://www.splcenter.org/>

### **Museum of Tolerance Online Multimedia Learning Center**

The Simon Wiesenthal Center provides a wealth of resources examining racial prejudice.

<http://motlc.wiesenthal.com/>

### **U.S. Department of Justice: "Hateful Acts Hurt Kids"**

Designed for children from the Department of Justice this web site offers great information geared for elementary school children, parents and teachers.

<http://www.usdoj.gov/kidspage>

## **Vocabulary:**

### **assumption**

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

**Context:** Non-Asians often make the assumption that Asians are smart.

### **bias**

**Definition:** Attitudes or behaviors based on stereotypes of people.

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

### **ethnicity**

**Definition:** A categorization of people according to shared culture, language, or geographic region.

**Context:** The terms “Italian” and “Irish” describe two distinct ethnic groups.

### **race**

**Definition:** A categorization of people based on 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 by race, which is categorized as Black, White, Latino, or Native American.

### **stereotype**

**Definition:** A generalized picture of a person, created without taking the whole person into account; to make such a generalization.

**Context:** When we stereotype a group of people, we depict all of the individuals within that group as having the same characteristics.

## **Academic Standards:**

### **Subject Area:**

Behavioral Studies

### **Grade Level:**

9-12

### **Standard:**

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

### **Benchmark:**

Understands how the diverse elements that contribute to the development and transmission of culture (e.g., language, literature, the arts, traditions, beliefs, values, behavior patterns) function as an integrated whole.

**Subject Area:**

Working with others

**Grade Level:**

K-12

**Standard:**

Contributes to the overall effort of a group.

**Benchmark:**

Demonstrates respect for others in a group.

**Credit:**

Tara Brown-L'Bahy, anti-bias educator and Ph.D. candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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## Identifying Stereotypes in the Media

Over the next several days, as you watch television programs, news, commercials, or films, note what stereotypes you find. Use the following questions to lead you through your analysis:

- Are the members of one group playing similar roles over and over again?
- Can you find certain similarities between the people who are portrayed as the “bad guys”; and those who are the “good guys”?
- Who plays the lead roles and who plays supporting roles?
- How does language, such as different languages or accents, shape your feelings about different characters?
- What groups are not portrayed in the media?

Date	TV Show, Movie, or Product Advertised	Group Stereotyped	Stereotype Portrayed	Thoughts