

## **Assignment Discovery Online Curriculum**

**Lesson Title:** Stages of Life

**Grade level:** 9-12

**Subject Area:** Human Body, Biology, Psychology

**Duration:** Two class periods

### **Objectives:**

The students will do the following:

- Examine the eight stages of human emotional and psychological development described by psychologist Erik Erikson
- Discuss Erikson's first five stages of life, infancy through adolescence, with a focus on the adolescent "identity crisis"

### **Materials:**

- Newsprint
- Paper and markers (for each group)
- Internet access

### **Procedures:**

1. As a class, brainstorm about the physical, emotional, and social developmental milestones of human beings. On a piece of newsprint, draw a timeline that begins with birth and ends with death. Write students' answers on the timeline. Responses may include first steps, first words, first day of school, puberty, first date, high school graduation, college, first job, marriage, having children, career promotions, and retirement.
2. Ask students to identify whether each milestone is physical, emotional, social, or a combination. Explain that psychologists have studied the relationships between these milestones of human aging and emotional and social development. They have developed theories about how personalities develop. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), considered the father of psychoanalysis, wrote that an individual's personality development depends on the resolution of conflicts between childhood sexual urges and demands of society. He said that human development included five distinct stages. Modern psychologist Erik Erikson refined and expanded Freud's theories into eight stages of development. He focused on the influence of society and culture on human personality development.
3. Briefly introduce Erikson to the class. Erik Erikson was born in Germany in 1902. In grammar school he was teased for being Jewish. At an early age Erikson did not feel comfortable as a German or as a Jew. This feeling was the basis for his notion of an "identity crisis," which he would define later when he became a psychologist. In the 1920s he met Anna Freud, a psychoanalyst and Sigmund Freud's daughter. He studied child psychoanalysis under her in Vienna. In 1933 he moved to the United States, where taught at Harvard, Yale, University of California at Berkeley, and other institutions. Erikson died in 1994.

4. Describe Erikson's theory of physical, emotional, and psychological human development, or "eight stages of life." He wrote that each stage of a person's life is characterized by a different psychological crisis that must be resolved before the person can successfully progress to the next stage. The success of each stage depends on how well the previous crisis was resolved. If a person does not resolve a crisis, it will continue to affect the person's development throughout life. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is widely accepted by psychologists today.
5. On a piece of newsprint, write the eight successive stages and the conflict that must be resolved. Students may not fully understand the terms used to describe the conflict but will learn more about them as they conduct their research and listen to the class presentations.

**Stage**

1. Infant
2. Toddler
3. Preschooler/Early Childhood
4. School Age/Play
5. Adolescence
6. Young Adulthood
7. Adulthood
8. Old Age

**Conflict**

- Basic trust vs. basic distrust  
 Autonomy vs. shame and doubt  
 Initiative vs. guilt  
 Industry vs. inferiority  
 Identity vs. role confusion  
 Intimacy vs. isolation  
 Generativity vs. stagnation  
 Ego integrity vs. despair

6. Divide the class into five groups; assign each group one of the first five stages. Ask students to use the Web sites listed below to research the stages. Students should record the following facts:
  - Name of stage
  - Age range
  - Crisis or conflict
  - Description
  - Positive outcome (also called virtues)
  - Negative outcome (also called maladaptations)
  - Significant relationships

Web sites

- <http://psychology.about.com/library/weekly/aa091500a.htm>  
<http://childdevelopmentinfo.com/development/erickson.shtml>  
<http://www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/erikson.html> (scroll down to chart of stages)  
<http://www.hcc.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/erikson.htm>

7. Tell students to find a partner within their group. Partners should discuss one example—ideally from their own lives—that illustrates a particular stage-specific crisis. Partners must describe a positive and negative outcome for their example. (For example, stage 4, or school age, is when children begin school and learn new skills. If this stage is met successfully, a child will develop a sense of competence. He or she is more likely to feel confident about learning new subjects in school, talking in class, and taking on new

challenges. If not, he or she will develop a sense of inferiority, may be reluctant to ask questions, and could fall behind, feeling stupid or discouraged.)

8. The next day, have groups give a brief presentation to teach the class about the stages of Erikson's theory. Then have each set of partners present their examples to the class.
9. Discuss the identity crisis of adolescence, which Erikson considered the most significant crisis of human psychosocial development. Ask students to talk about how this conflict plays a role in their own lives. What are some examples of teenagers struggling to define their own identity? Why do they think an identity crisis occurs for most people during their teenage years? What are basic skills and values that are necessary to successfully resolve an identity crisis? (Examples: confidence, trust, competence.)

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What are the significant relationships in each of the first five stages of a person's life? How do changes in these relationships reflect social and psychological changes in a person's life?
2. Describe an identity crisis you have struggled with in your own life. As you define your own identity, what are the different roles you must integrate? (Examples: daughter, teammate, worker, student, or boyfriend.) Where do you find inspiration? (Examples: specific role models, events, or beliefs.) Describe pressures that can make it difficult to define your own personality and beliefs.
3. Look closely at Erikson's fourth stage. Do you think he correctly identifies the primary struggle for school-aged children? From your own experience, do you think there might be another way to explain the fundamental changes that occur during this stage of life?

### **Extension:**

#### **Adult Development**

Ask students to interview people of different ages to learn about Erikson's sixth, seventh, and eighth stages. As a class, develop a list of questions for the interview, such as the following:

- What do you care most about? (Stage 6)
- Who are the most important people in your life? (Stage 6)
- What do you do with most of your time? (Stage 7)
- What are your goals? (Stage 7)
- What advice would you give to someone our age? (Stage 7)
- Which stages of your life have been most enjoyable? The most important? (Stage 8)
- What have been some of the most significant events of your life? Why? What age were you at each event? (Stage 8)

Encourage students to take careful notes during their interviews. Then have students give class presentations, comparing what they learned from the interviews about Erikson's final three stages of life.

### **Evaluation:**

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate how well students participated in class discussions, worked within their groups, and created their presentations on the first five stages of life.

**Three points:** active participation in class discussion; insightful and mature when working in a group; clear, thorough presentation created with several details about the assigned stage of life.

**Two points:** average participation in class discussion; average interest and participation when working in a group; presentation created with some details about the assigned stage of life.

**One point:** little participation in class discussion; difficulty working in a group; incomplete presentation created with few or no details about the assigned stage of life.

Suggested Reading:

***Everything Your Baby Would Ask ... If Only He or She Could Talk***

Kyra Karmiloff and Annette Karmiloff-Smith. Golden Books, 1999.

With a twist on most books about babies, this one approaches the topic of infant development by taking the infant's point of view. Learn about life before birth, what it's like to be born, how babies relate to people, how they learn language and to move and use their hands, and how intelligence develops. Color photographs (of very cute babies!) are sprinkled throughout the book. The occasional question-and-answer format adds extra information. This is a terrific presentation!

***Your Baby's First Year: A Guide for Teenage Parents***

Jeanne Warren Lindsay. Morning Glory Press, 1999.

Although written for the teen parent, the information in this lucid presentation is appropriate for adults as well. The book is divided into four sections: Those First Months, Health Care and Family, Your Baby Is Ready to Move, and Leaving Baby Stage Behind. Each section has lots of practical information, including why babies cry, accident-proofing the home, and coping with a toddler who is getting into everything. The importance of teen parents staying in school and planning for the future is emphasized. An annotated bibliography lists many useful titles for further information.

## **Vocabulary**

### **adolescence**

Definition: The period of life from puberty to maturity; usually occurs during a person's teen years.

Context: According to Erik Erikson's theory, **adolescence** is the fifth major stage of a person's life.

### **identity crisis**

Definition: Role confusion, or an uncertainty about one's place in society and the world.

Context: Erikson believed that one's **identity crisis** first occurred during adolescence and was the most significant conflict a person would face.

### **psychoanalysis**

Definition: A method of analyzing and treating mental illness that involves treatment sessions, during which the patient is encouraged to talk freely about personal experiences, particularly those during childhood.

Context: Austrian physician Sigmund Freud is considered the founder of modern **psychoanalysis**.

### **psychology**

Definition: The science or study of mind and behavior.

Context: After developing his theory of human development, Erik Erikson became renowned as an expert on **psychology**.

### **psychosocial**

Definition: Involving both psychological and social aspects.

Context: Erik Erikson's theory of **psychosocial** development focuses on a psychological crisis at each of eight stages of a person's life.

### **Academic Standards:**

This lesson adheres to the following standards from the National Council for the Social Studies for students in grades 9-12:

- Provide for the study of individual development and identity.
- Provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.

This lesson also adheres to the following National Science Education Standards for students in grades 9-12:

- Life science

### **Credit:**

Joy Brewster, a freelance writer and editor of educational material.

This lesson was developed in consultation with Don Demember, a biology and life science teacher.

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