

# COMMITTING TO RESPECT: LESSONS FOR STUDENTS TO ADDRESS BIAS





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# INTRODUCTION

## **ABOUT THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE**

The Anti-Defamation League was founded in 1913 “to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Now the nation’s premier civil rights/human relations agency fighting anti-Semitism and all forms of bigotry, ADL defends democratic ideals and protects civil rights for all.

A leader in the development of materials, programs and services, ADL builds bridges of communication, understanding and respect among diverse groups, carrying out its mission through a network of 30 Regional and Satellite Offices in the United States and abroad.

## **ABOUT THE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® INSTITUTE**

The Anti-Defamation League’s A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute is a market leader in the development and delivery of anti-bias and diversity training and resources. Human relations and education professionals design training modules and produce curricula that provide the necessary skills, knowledge and awareness to promote and sustain inclusive and respectful school, work and home environments. Customized to meet the changing needs of a wide range of audiences, programs are available to schools, universities, corporations and community-based organizations throughout the United States and abroad. The origins of the A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute date back to 1985, when ADL and WCVB-TV in Boston initiated the A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE campaign, a year-long series of education and media-driven programs designed to combat prejudice and create effective tools to address these issues in the classroom and community. The campaign’s immense success led to ongoing programs in Boston and 28 U.S. cities and several national awards including a Peabody, Gabriel, and Scripps-Howard.

In 1992, in an effort to meet the increasing demand for its services and to formalize and coordinate its anti-bias research, programming and training efforts, the League created and officially launched the A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute, comprised of four distinct departments — CLASSROOM, CAMPUS, COMMUNITY, and WORKPLACE.

A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute training programs and curricular materials are developed and evaluated by a research department that interacts on an ongoing basis with professionals in the field. The Institute collaborates with universities, colleges and national funding sources to study and enhance the efficacy of its programs. These collaborations have included formal studies with prominent institutions including Yale University, Columbia University Teachers College, Claremont Graduate School and the University of Pennsylvania.

Through the development and delivery of its programs and resources, the Institute seeks to help participants: recognize bias and the harm it inflicts on individuals and society; explore the value of diversity; improve intergroup relations; and combat racism, anti-Semitism and all forms of prejudice and bigotry.

A CLASSROOM OF DIFFERENCE™ is at the heart of the Institute, developed to address diversity in the pre-kindergarten through 12th grade school communities. Programs include workshops for teachers, classified staff, administrators, students and family members.

### **GOALS OF A CLASSROOM OF DIFFERENCE™**

The following are the overall goals of A CLASSROOM OF DIFFERENCE™ for all audiences:

- To promote respectful, inclusive and safe learning environments and communities
- To build understanding of the value and benefits of diversity
- To improve intergroup relations
- To eradicate anti-Semitism, racism and all forms of bigotry
- To encourage personal responsibility in the promotion of justice and equity.

# ABOUT THE GUIDE

September 11, 2001 was a seminal moment in American history because of the scope of the devastation wrought by the terrorists, the vulnerability their acts engendered and the resultant tension between security and civil liberties. It also forced the American people to reexamine how effective we were in sustaining inclusive and cohesive communities, as some individuals – including youth – were bullied and attacked because of their actual or perceived religious and ethnic identities.

In response to 9/11, many governmental representatives, law enforcement officials and religious leaders took a stand, condemning any form of intolerance, finding effective ways to highlight the individual, group and civilizational bonds that unite us, and creating programs and policies to foster respect for and inclusion of our differences.

Perhaps the most important tool to combat hatred and foster respect is education. There can be no more fitting commemoration of the tenth anniversary of September 11, 2001 than to provide opportunities for our future leaders, our students, to effectively address and combat bullying and bias in their schools and their communities.

The Anti-Defamation League’s A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute has comprehensive programs and curriculum for students and teachers, reaching over fifty million in the last quarter century. This guide includes specially selected lesson plans to assist educators in helping their students better understand concepts of bias and discrimination and respond to them in productive ways.

<p><b>Preschool Lesson</b> From <i>Bias-Free Foundations: Early Childhood Guidebook &amp; Activities for Educators</i></p>	<p><b>What’s In A Name?</b> emphasizes the value of children’s names and how hurtful it can be when children are devalued through name-calling.</p>
<p><b>Elementary School Lesson</b> From <i>Anti-Bias Study Guide (Elementary/Intermediate Level)</i></p>	<p><b>Stereotypes</b> helps students analyze stereotypes and consider how stereotypical statements ignore individual differences. The lesson also provides an opportunity for students to examine stereotypes based on gender.</p>
<p><b>Secondary School Lesson</b> From <i>Anti-Bias Study Guide (Secondary Level)</i></p>	<p><b>Our Diverse Communities</b> asks students to examine the diversity of their local communities and of the nation, and to consider the question, “Who is an American?”</p>

These lessons are adapted from ADL's A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute curriculum guides and are only available through ADL anti-bias training. However, ADL is pleased make these three lessons available in this special guide to help engage students in these important discussions. Additionally, ADL's free online curriculum – Curriculum Connections – provides educators with topic-specific lessons to help them integrate multicultural, anti-bias, and social justice themes into their curricula. Go to [www.adl.org/education/curriculum\\_connections](http://www.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections) for these lessons.

For more information about ADL's A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute training programs and curriculum, please contact your nearest ADL regional office or by email at [education@adl.org](mailto:education@adl.org).

# THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Studies have demonstrated a high correlation between teachers' respect for diversity and the learning potential of those students with whom the schools have traditionally had the least success. The A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute focuses on supporting teachers so that they can effectively teach anti-bias curricula. Teachers are encouraged to learn about their particular students and their students' needs and cultures, and to use that knowledge to enhance self-respect in their students and to encourage their success. Teachers are role models and their actions say as much as their words. To prepare for successful delivery of an anti-bias education program, teachers should consider making the following practices an integral part of their everyday practice:

## GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS

- 1. Self-Exploration:** Examine your own cultural biases and assumptions. Explore your perceptions and understanding of situations by developing an awareness of your cultural "filters."
- 2. Comprehensive Integration:** Integrate culturally diverse information/perspectives in all aspects of your teaching. Relegating equity issues to special or "multicultural" time sends a message to students that such issues are unimportant relative to other aspects of the curriculum. Consider moving beyond the constraints of a cultural history month to exploring historical events through multiple perspectives and experiences.
- 3. Time and Maturation:** Allow time for the process to develop. Introduce less complex topics first, and create time to establish trust. Develop ground rules for discussion which allow for honest discussion within a respectful context. Recognize that the long history of mistrust between people in different groups will not dissipate quickly.
- 4. Accepting Environment:** Establish an environment that allows for mistakes. Since most of us have been unconsciously acculturated into prejudicial and stereotypical thinking, we may not be aware that certain attitudes are harmful to ourselves and others. Acknowledge that intolerant thinking will surface from time to time in ourselves and others. Model non-defensive responses when told that something you said or did was offensive to someone. Assume good will and make that assumption a common practice in the classroom.
- 5. Intervention:** Be prepared to respond to purposefully directed acts of bias. Students will carefully observe how you intervene when someone is the target of discriminatory and hate-based behavior. Silence in the face of injustice conveys the impression that the behavior is condoned or not worthy of attention. Make it clear to students and their families that you will not allow name calling in the classroom; explain the thinking behind "zero tolerance" of prejudice and discrimination. Your appropriate and timely intervention is critical in establishing a safe classroom environment where all students can succeed.
- 6. Lifelong Learning:** Keep abreast of current issues and discuss them with students. Clip articles from newspapers and magazines and post them in the classroom. Let students know that you consider yourself a learner in these issues and that you see yourself as part of the learning process.
- 7. Discovery Learning:** Avoid "preaching" to students about how they should behave. Research indicates that exhortation is the least effective methodology for changing prejudiced attitudes; in fact it often produces a result opposite from the desired effect. Provide opportunities for students to resolve conflicts, solve problems, work in diverse teams and think critically about information.

- 8. Life Experiences:** Provide opportunities for students to share life experiences or choose literature that will help students develop empathy. Make your classroom a place where students' experiences are not marginalized, trivialized or invalidated. Prejudice and discrimination have a unique impact on each individual. Students and their families develop a variety of coping strategies based upon the type and frequency of discrimination they have experienced. It is not fruitful to engage in a debate over who has suffered the most. Oppression is harmful in all of its forms.
- 9. Resources Review:** Review materials so that classroom displays and bulletin boards are inclusive of all people. Insure that supplemental books and videos do not reinforce existing stereotypes. When you see such examples in textbooks, point them out to students and encourage them to think critically about and challenge them.
- 10. Home-School-Community Connection:** Involve parents, family members and the community in the learning process. Understand that families and other community members provide the context in which students learn and are motivated to learn. We cannot view the school and the home or school and the community as isolated from one another; we must examine how they interconnect with each other and with the world.

# WHAT'S IN A NAME?

*An activity introducing the value of names for preschool children.*

## RATIONALE

This activity emphasizes the value of children's names and how hurtful it can be when children experience name-calling. Children will practice how to respond when they hear name-calling.

## OBJECTIVES

- Children will learn to respect themselves.
- Children will learn to respect others.
- Children will learn to take a stand.

## LESSON PREPARATION

**Handouts/Supporting Documents:** None

**Other Materials:** None

**Advance Preparation:** None

## ABOUT THIS LESSON

**Time:** 10-20 minutes

**Key Words and Phrases:** differences, names that hurt, similarities, syllables

## PROCEDURES

1. At circle time, show children how you can say your name and clap out the syllables.
2. Taking turns, ask each child to say and clap his or her name. When everyone has had a turn, go around the circle again. This time everyone should chant and clap each child's name.
3. Talk with children about the similarities and differences in children's names, for example, "Kenya and Kevin, your names both begin with the letter k." Help children to see how special their names are because they are chosen just for them. You might say, "Sarah, your family chose a special name for you. When I hear or say the name Sarah I will always think of you."
4. Say your name again, and tell about something that you like to do. Invite children to take turns doing the same.
5. Then have children introduce the child next to them by saying the child's name and what he or she likes to do.

6. Repeat the activity at another time. Remind children that their names are special. People feel proud of their names because their names describe them. You might say, "People like to be called by their real names. Sometimes people use other names—names that hurt. Has anyone ever called you a name that hurt? What happened? How did you feel? What did you do?"
7. Let children practice standing up to a name-caller. Give them words to say such as, "I don't like it when you call me that. It isn't nice, and it hurts my feelings. Please don't call me that name again."
8. Repeat the activity as new children enter the group, or when name-calling situations arise.

**Adapted from *Bias-Free Foundations: Early Childhood Guidebook & Activities for Educators*.**

New York: Anti-Defamation League, 2001, 2005.

# STEREOTYPES

*An activity introducing the concept of and problems with stereotypes for elementary school students.*

## RATIONALE

The activity helps students analyze stereotypes and consider how stereotypical statements ignore individual differences. The lesson also provides an opportunity for students to examine stereotypes based on gender and to explore how viewing people through a narrow lens is limiting for everyone.

**Note:** When discussing stereotypes with students there is always the risk of introducing them to generalizations that they did not know before. Special care should be taken when debriefing this activity to reinforce the idea that stereotypes are not true just because many people believe them. It is also important to create an environment where students feel comfortable asking questions about the origins of specific stereotypes and why certain stereotypes continue to be believed.

## OBJECTIVES

- Students will consider how generalizations and stereotypes do not allow for individual differences.
- Students will examine language often associated with stereotypes.
- Students will examine stereotypes associated with gender.
- Students will explore ways that stereotypes are perpetuated.

## LESSON PREPARATION

**Handouts/Supporting Documents:** *First Thoughts*, one per student

**Other Materials:** chalk/white board and chalk/dry erase markers

**Advance Preparation:** Reproduce handout as directed above.

## ABOUT THIS LESSON

**Time:** 2 class periods

**Key Words and Phrases:** vicious, generalization, stereotype, myth, gender, gender-neutral

## PROCEDURES

### Part I: Generalization and Stereotype

1. Begin this lesson by writing the statements below on the board.
  - All dogs are vicious.
  - All cities are dirty.

Ask students what they think about each of the statements. Ask students if they believe these statements are true and, if not, what might be the harm in stating something so that it sounds like it's a fact. Ask students if they have ever been around a dog that wasn't vicious or if they know enough about every city to say that they are all dirty.

2. Introduce students to the word “generalization.” Explain that many people state their thoughts and opinions in a way that sound as if they are facts. Provide the class with other examples and then have students give similar examples of generalizations about places or things (e.g., living on a farm is boring, classical music is boring).
3. Explain that in addition to making generalizations about places and things, similar statements are often made about individuals and groups of people; these are called stereotypes.

**Note:** A stereotype is an oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences. Even seemingly positive stereotypes that link a person or group to a specific positive trait can have negative consequences.

Write the following examples of stereotypes on the board and have students read them aloud.

- All boys like to build things.
  - Girls hate sports.
  - Most people who wear glasses read all the time.
  - All the kids who live in that neighborhood are poor.
  - African Americans love to dance.
  - Asian Americans are good at math.
4. Have students critically examine each of the statements, using the following questions to guide the process.
    - Do you think that boys like to build things? Have you ever known a boy who wasn’t interested in building things?
    - Does the statement imply that girls don’t like to build things?
    - How does the word “all” make this statement inaccurate?
    - Do any of the girls in this classroom like sports? If so, which sports do you like?
    - How might a statement like “girls hate sports” make it difficult for a girl to admit that she likes sports (e.g., wouldn’t want to appear to be the exception, might make people think she didn’t like “normal” things)?
    - Do you know for certain if most people who wear glasses read all the time? How many people is most people?
    - What might happen if everyone believes that most people who wear glasses read all the time (e.g., people who wear glasses might not be asked to participate in other activities)?
    - What’s wrong with saying that all kids in a certain neighborhood are poor?
    - Do words like rich and poor always have to do with money? What are some other ways besides having money that someone might be rich?
    - Is there a problem with making statements like “All African Americans like to dance” or “All Asian Americans are good at math?” Explain your thinking.

**Note:** Explain to students that while all stereotypes are hurtful because they group people into one category and do not allow for individual differences, some stereotypes are particularly dangerous because they express very negative things about a group of people. Depending on the maturity level of students, discuss how stereotypes that link groups of people with characteristics like “violent,” “lazy,” “greedy,” “deviant” or “sly,” among others, perpetuate hateful attitudes and hurt individuals and entire communities. Also help students think about why and how people who are the targets of such stereotypes may begin to believe they are true.

5. Have students share stereotypes that they have heard using the following questions to guide the discussion.
  - Think about some of the groups to which you belong. Have you ever heard a stereotype about a group to which you belong? If so, what was the stereotype? How did you feel when you heard this stereotype?

- Have you ever heard a stereotype about another group of people? If so, what was the stereotype? How did you feel when you heard the stereotype?
  - How do you think a person who belongs to that particular group would feel hearing this stereotype?
  - What are some words that often indicate a stereotypical statement (e.g., all, many, few, none)?
  - Why is it important to use such words carefully when talking about people?
6. Explain to the class that the next part of this lesson will give them an opportunity to consider stereotypes based on gender.

## Part II: Understanding Gender-based Stereotypes

7. Distribute the *First Thoughts* handout and instruct them to complete the handout.
8. Divide them into small groups. Ask each group to select a recorder who will write down how many people in their small group put down M or F for each profession.
9. After students completed the small group work, reconvene the group. Go through the list, and instruct each recorder to report the votes for each profession. Write the totals on the board.
10. Have a whole-group discussion using the following questions.
- What patterns do you see? What does that tell you about professions?
  - Where do people learn stereotypes about gender (e.g., advertisements, other people)?
  - How does gender-specific language (e.g., fireman, stewardess) limit possibilities for both boys and girls? What other words could be used (e.g., firefighter, flight attendant)?
- Note:** Introduce students to the term “gender-neutral language.” Explain that gender-neutral language does not specify male or female when it is not necessary or relevant. Gender-neutral language helps to dispel stereotypes about males and females.
- What is the benefit of gender-neutral language?
  - How might stereotypes about men and women keep people from doing what they enjoy?
  - How can men and women not doing what they enjoy or what they want to do hurt them and deny society of their talents?
11. Explain to students that stereotypes are frequently perpetuated through visual images. Provide examples (e.g., advertisements that show girls playing with dolls and boys building things reinforce stereotypes about what boys and girls like to do).
12. Instruct students to keep a log of advertisements that they see on television, on billboards or in magazines over the course of several days. At the end of the designated time period, have students share their observations in small groups, with the class or in an essay entitled “Advertising and Stereotypes.”
13. End this lesson with a review of the definition of stereotype, language often associated with stereotypical statements, ways that stereotyping limits people and is hurtful to everyone, and the role that advertising plays in the perpetuation of stereotypes.

Adapted from *A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute Anti-Bias Study Guide (Elementary/Intermediate Level)*.

New York: Anti-Defamation League, 2000.



# FIRST THOUGHTS

**Directions:** Read each profession listed below and write down the first person you picture in that position — a man or a woman. Do not write what you think is the gender of the “right” answer, write the gender of the first person you picture in your mind. Put an M on the line for male and F on the line for female.

- |                  |                          |                         |
|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| ___ doctor       | ___ professional athlete | ___ pilot               |
| ___ cook         | ___ principal            | ___ computer programmer |
| ___ teacher      | ___ reporter             | ___ writer              |
| ___ hair stylist | ___ construction worker  | ___ carpenter           |
| ___ lawyer       | ___ senator              | ___ bus driver          |
| ___ scientist    | ___ police officer       | ___ librarian           |
| ___ car mechanic | ___ plumber              | ___ secretary           |
| ___ judge        | ___ firefighter          | ___ flight attendant    |
| ___ nurse        | ___ president            |                         |



# OUR DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

An activity about who is an American for high school students.

## RATIONALE

The purpose of this lesson is for students to examine the diversity of their local communities and of the nation. The lesson includes four essays that answered the question, “Who is an American?” which were written following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

## OBJECTIVES

- Students will examine the cultural diversity of their communities and of the United States.
- Students will research their own heritages.
- Students will discuss the benefits of learning about their diverse communities.

## LESSON PREPARATION

### Handouts/Supporting Documents:

- *Who Is An American?* (Voices I–IV), copies of one reading for each small group
- *Who Is An American? Discussion Questions*, one per student
- *15 Largest Ancestry Groups*, one copy

**Other Materials:** chalk/white board and chalk/dry erase markers

### Advance Preparation:

- Reproduce handouts as directed above.
- Create an overhead transparency of *15 Largest Ancestry Groups* or save it on a laptop to project on a large screen.

## ABOUT THIS LESSON

**Time:** 2 class periods

**Key Words and Phrases:** ancestry census diversity immigration restricted

## PROCEDURES

### Part I: Cultures in Our Community

1. Ask students to identify the cultural groups that make up their school community and list them on the board under the heading “Cultures Represented in Our Community.”

#### Example:

English	Native American	Italian	Polish	Catholic
Jamaican	Mexican	Korean	African American	Christian
Canadian	Irish	Hmong	Chinese	Muslim
El Salvadorean	French	German	Dominican	Jewish

2. **(Optional)** Pair students and have them research some of the different cultures represented in the community. Have students conduct interviews with community members in conjunction with library and online research. Provide structure for students and encourage them to limit their investigations to three areas of inquiry: where, when and why people came to the U.S. Provide students with guidance about being culturally sensitive as they conduct their interviews.
3. After students have identified as many groups as they can, ask them to identify which groups would not be on the list if all of the people who now live in the United States, but whose ancestors came from another country, were forced to return to their homeland. Cross these groups out.  
**Note:** If Native Americans are on the list, they will be the only group remaining.
4. Discuss the following:
  - How has the experience of Native Americans, African Americans and Latino/a Americans in the Southwest been different from that of other groups in the United States? (Native Americans were already settled on U.S. land before European explorers arrived. Many African Americans came to the U.S. involuntarily on slave ships. Many Mexicans owned land and lived in parts of Texas and California before the U.S. government took those lands.)
  - What have been the benefits to the country of having many different groups come to the United States?
  - What have been the challenges of so many different groups coming to the U.S.?

## **Part II: Comparing Local and National Cultural Composition**

5. Ask students if they think that the cultural make-up of their school community (as reflected in the list created in step #1) is reflective of the cultural make-up of the country. Have them discuss in pairs and write down which ancestry groups they think represent the 15 largest according to the U.S. Census. (Explain that ancestry refers to a person's ethnic origin, heritage or the place of birth of the person or person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States.)
6. Share the correct answers with students by projecting the handout *15 Largest Ancestry Groups*. Conduct a discussion using the following questions:
  - Was there a big difference between who you thought were the top 15 ancestry groups and what the Census revealed? If so, what might account for the difference?
  - How does the diversity of our community reflect the diversity of the nation overall? What has contributed to the ethnic diversity or uniformity of our community?
  - What are the benefits and challenges of living in a diverse country?
  - The number of people who reported themselves as "American" and no other ancestry increased from 12.4 million in the 1990 census to 20.2 million in 2000, the largest numerical growth of any group during the 1990s. What historical and political factors might lead people to self-define differently at different times?
  - Why do you think the government conducts a census? What are some ways that census information can be used by educational institutions, law enforcement agencies, health care providers, retail businesses and others?

### Part III: Exploring What it Means to be an American

7. Have students form four groups and assign each group one of the readings from the *Who Is An American?* series of handouts. Distribute the readings and the *Who Is An American? Discussion Questions* handout to the groups.
8. Instruct students to read the essay to themselves and then discuss the questions on the accompanying handout as a group.

**Note:** Explain to the students that the four narratives in the *Who Is An American?* handout are from the book *My America: What My Country Means to Me* and were written in response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Point out that this crisis prompted many people to reflect on issues including patriotism and diversity, and that we can learn from their insights. However, encourage students to think broadly about the narratives, to think of the readings as having wider implications than merely as responses to a specific historical event.

9. After students have explored the questions in their small groups, lead a whole class discussion using the following questions as a guide:
  - In what ways do you identify with the person whose narrative you read?
  - In what ways is your family's experience similar to or different from the experience described in the narrative you read?
  - What are the challenges and benefits of living in a diverse country/community?
  - In one of the pieces, poet Nikki Giovanni says, "...attention must be paid...to how the bounty came to be ours...to all the people...who make up the people...that we are." What do you think she means by this? Who are the "people that make up the people that we are"?

**Adapted from A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute Anti-Bias Study Guide (Secondary Level).**

New York: Anti-Defamation League, 2009.

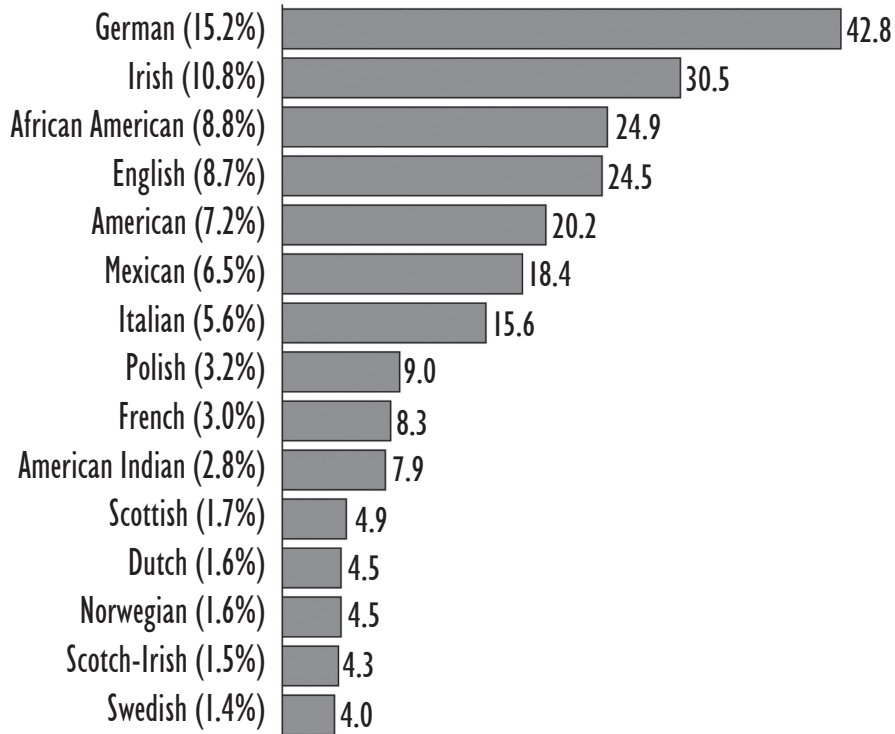


## Our Diverse Communities

### 15 LARGEST ANCESTRY GROUPS

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*(In millions. Percent of total population in parentheses).*



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.



# WHO IS AN AMERICAN?

*Voice I: Barry Hantman*

But in America, “We have it in our power to begin the world over again.”

America means that the Old World with its rigid and royal ways has been embraced by the New World of opportunity and hope. America is a chance to undo hateful patterns.

Anastasia is one of the best students I’ve encountered during my teaching career. A vibrant young lady with blond hair and blue eyes, Anastasia hails from Minsk, the largest city in the former Soviet republic of Belarus. My grandmother fled a Jewish shtetl near Minsk. Avoiding pogroms and the czar’s secret police were worthy Russian Jewish goals a century ago. Grandma Lena would never see her parents again when she immigrated to New York City. The jam-packed Lower East Side awaited. What were her thoughts as she sailed past the Mother of Exiles in New York Harbor?

It’s now been eighty-five years since my grandmother’s exodus. On a class trip to the United Nations, I look through the grimy window to catch a glimpse of Lady Liberty. Later in the morning, Anastasia can be seen glued to the corner of the gift shop. She is drawn to some colorful UN stamps. “Are you a collector?” I inquire. “I used to have a large stamp collection but we left everything behind when we quickly departed.” I discreetly purchase the stamps and hand them to Anastasia as a surprise gift. “Now you must begin another collection!” She smiles and agrees, “Yes it is important to start over.”

A few weeks later, Anastasia asks me to write a letter of recommendation for her college application. The historical irony does not escape me. Grandma Lena’s Jewish grandson is helping Anastasia succeed thousands of miles from the same Dnieper River that flows through both our families. In Minsk at another time, Anastasia and I would have harbored many negative preconceptions about each other. But in America, “We have it in our power to begin the world over again” (Thomas Paine).

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*Barry Hantman is a teacher in New York City.*

**From Hugh Downs, *My America, What My Country Means to Me by 150 Americans from All Walks of Life***

(New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 105. Reprinted with permission of Scribner, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, © 2002 by Hugh Downs. All rights reserved.



# WHO IS AN AMERICAN?

*Voice II: Pete Hamill*

He went to work because he was now an American and this country allowed him to work. He wasn't asked about his religion. He wasn't asked about his family history. He wasn't asked about his political beliefs. This was America.

One August night when I was a boy, I heard my father weeping in the dark. He was an immigrant from the bleak bigotries of Northern Ireland, and when he was twenty-seven he had lost a leg to gangrene, playing soccer in the immigrant leagues of Brooklyn. That loss did not keep him from work. He worked as a clerk in a grocery chain, in a war plant in Bush Terminal making bombsights, and as an electrical wirer in a factory in Brooklyn. He married my mother, also an immigrant from the North of Ireland, and fathered seven children, of whom I was the oldest.

On this scalding summer night he wasn't weeping because the family, as always, was short of money. He wasn't weeping out of self-pity, that most unforgivable of sins. He was weeping in sheer physical pain. The stump of his ruined leg was covered with blisters caused by the heat wave. In the factory where he worked, there were concrete floors and no air-conditioning. The pain was more than he could bear. My mother rose in the dark and whispered to him and placed ice on the blistered stump, and consoled and nursed him until he was quiet. In the morning, he went to work.

I'm sure he wasn't alone. All over New York a half-century ago, all over this nation, there were men like him, and women like my mother. In spite of pain, they were thrilled to be in a country where they could work. They were thrilled to be in a country where they need bow before no king, where they could choose their leaders, where they could join trade unions, where they could read any books from the shelves of the public libraries. Their lives were far from perfect; many died poor, most worked at jobs they did not like, too many were subjected to ignorant bigotries. A few became criminals. A few were broken by America and went home in defeat.

But the overwhelming majority had a belief in the day after tomorrow. Tomorrow might not be better for them, but the day after surely would be wonderful. They lived to see their American children become the first in all the centuries of their families to graduate from universities. They saw their American children find work in places where their bodies were not blistered by summer heat. Some of their children became mayors or senators. Some triumphed in art or the academy, in journalism or business, in sports or entertainment. All made the United States a better country.

For me, the presence of those immigrants is fundamental to this nation. A century ago, their hope, idealism, and capacity for work shaped the armature of the modern American nation. And that is as true today as it was before World War I, as a new generation of immigrants adds its presence to the United States. I see them each morning on the streets of New York. That Chinese woman laboring on Canal Street is my mother too, working for her

children. That Mexican man heaving garbage cans into a truck at two in the morning: he's my father. They are part of the alloy that gives this nation so much strength. They help account for our tolerance, our liberal freedoms, our generosity. They enrich us in many other ways too: with labor, with music, with food, with humor, with their fundamental dignity.

Some Americans might be stirred into love of country by the sight of B-52 vapor trails. I prefer the image of a young Mexican-American woman in cap and gown, surrounded by weeping parents and aunts and uncle and brothers and sisters, walking into an early summer afternoon, clutching a diploma. In that moment, she honors her family. She honors mine too, and all those where a parent once wept in the dark. Above all, she honors America.

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*Pete Hamill is a journalist and best selling author.*

**From Hugh Downs, *My America, What My Country Means to Me by 150 Americans from All Walks of Life***

(New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 102–104. Reprinted with permission of Scribner, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, © 2002 by Hugh Downs. All rights reserved.

# WHO IS AN AMERICAN?

*Voice III: Nikki Giovanni*

My America

Not a bad country...neither the best nor the worst...just a place we call home...and we open that door...to the tired and the poor...to the huddled masses yearning...to be free...to those in need...because we need...to be needed

Not a bad country...but adolescently indifferent...with time running out...on our innocence

Not a bad country...but attention must be paid...to how the bounty came to be ours...to all the people...who make up the people...that we are

A thought here and there...a "maybe this could have been done differently"...the patience that is required of those who aspire to be...if not the best...then at least better

Not a bad country in fact...most likely...the best possible hope...of human beings...to exemplify differences that: can share prosperity...can tolerate choices...can respect individuals...can teach us all...to love

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*Nikki Giovanni is a poet and the recipient of the Langston Hughes Award for Distinguished Contributions to the Arts and Letters.*

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# WHO IS AN AMERICAN?

*Voice IV: Margaret Cho*

This is my country. And yet, the America that I turn to, while still longing to be proud and patriotic, is as frustrated and multicultural as myself.

Somehow, saying "I am an American" makes me think Uncle Sam is going to reach out and pat me on the arm, the same hand he points with to show me that he wants me, and patronizingly say, "Sure you are, dear...." When I say, "I am an American" to my family, to my tribe, my culture, it reads, "I want to be white." And in a way, I do. I want power. I want privilege. I want double-lidded eyes and naturally curly hair and not to have to always tell people where I am from and to maybe someday hope to appear in a costume drama. To act in one of those elegant, sweeping film epics that are so lavishly made about white history is one of the saddest dreams in my life, as it may never happen, because of the color of my skin and the insistence by the film industry that Caucasians were the only ones around in the past.

And I'd like to not feel so alone in my desire. One of the most heartbreaking things for me, after September 11, was when CNN was running a series of spots, each one a brief eulogy of a victim at the World Trade Center. They were morbid, but infinitely modern, yet touching at the same time, these commercials for the dead. One pictured a young, good-looking Korean man, smiling, talking about his brother, as if he were right there in the room with him. "He always acts like he's older than me, even though he knows I've got three years on him. He's just that responsible type of guy, you know. Taking care of business. That's my bro!" Screen fades to black, and then an image of the lost responsible one, with his name appearing slowly at the bottom. A Korean name, a Korean face. I wept despite my own cynicism.

We were Americans too, and we were there, and we lost just as much as everyone else. It made me feel closer to all those nouveau patriots, waving their flags from their cars like diplomats, even though it was corny and just a way to recycle those old Lakers flag holders. It made me think, this is where my America lies. This is my country. And yet, the America that I turn to, while still longing to be proud and patriotic, is as frustrated and multicultural as myself. My America lies with the mosques all over L.A., and the world, besieged with hateful phone calls, mail, and graffiti, a convenient depository for hate, while the true enemy remained at large.

My America lies with the postal workers, with two men already dead from inhalation anthrax, angry at the unjust, lackadaisical attempt at health care given to them as opposed to the outright hysteria on Capitol Hill. My America is the Flight 93 hero Mark Bingham, the all-American athlete, brave in giving up his life to save others, fighting the terrorists in the cockpit as the plane went down, the first soldier in the war against terrorism, and an openly gay man. My America is Arab Americans, getting hassled at the airport, unable to board flights, guilty of having the wrong last name. My America is about people volunteering to escort Muslim American women and children to school and to shopping, trying to give charity in the form of assurance. "I'm with you, you are going to be okay. You belong here."

What is so terrible about the attacks, the tragedy that goes along with all the death and destruction, is that it turns us against ourselves. The mysterious face, danger hidden behind race, peril and doom in cultures unfamiliar, unknown – the fears that come right down to us and them. It scares me. Because any of us could be next. Any of us who ever felt uncomfortable behind our face. What our country needs now is an escort to walk us to school, to shopping. Someone there to say, “I’m with you, you are going to be okay. You belong here.”

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*Margaret Cho is a comedian, writer, and creator of the successful off-Broadway show, I’m the One that I Want.*

**From Hugh Downs, *My America, What My Country Means to Me by 150 Americans from All Walks of Life*** (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 46–47. Reprinted with permission of Scribner, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, © 2002 by Hugh Downs. All rights reserved.

# WHO IS AN AMERICAN? DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**Directions:** Discuss the questions below in response to your reading. Focus on those questions that have relevance to the narrative you read and disregard those that are not addressed by the author.

1. What do you think is the primary message the writer of the narrative you read is trying to communicate?
2. According to the author, what does it mean to be an American?
3. How does the author view the presence of immigrants in the U.S. both historically and in present times?
4. How does he or she feel the immigrant experience relates to the American experience?
5. What is the author's view on the assimilation of people from different backgrounds into American culture?
6. What does the author say about our responsibility regarding the treatment of people from different cultures or backgrounds?
7. In what ways does the author feel that the U.S. has acted positively and/or negatively toward its diverse communities?
8. Are there future actions that the author feels the U.S. should take to better accommodate its diverse communities?







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