

Lesson Plan and Overview

Lesson Plan: [When Hateful Symbols Cause Hurt and Harm](#)

Symbols and images are part of our daily lives and society. They can convey positive, negative and neutral messages about people, ideas, emotions, beliefs and values. Hate symbols, which we also see around us regularly, have the power to convey or express messages of hate, bias, prejudice and injustice. Because bias incidents in communities and schools often include hate symbols, discussing hate symbols is an important topic of conversation to have in schools and classrooms.

Grade Level Grades K–5

Learning Objectives

- Students will understand what symbols are and their importance.
- Students will reflect on hate symbols they have seen.
- Students will explore and consider the power and impact of hate symbols.

[Note: For each section of the Core Activity, there are variations for students in grades K-2. For these early grades, please review the Core Activity but use the “Variation for Students in Grades K-2.”]

Materials Needed

- Symbols ([heart](#), [stop sign](#), [smile](#), [wheelchair](#), [question mark](#), [sun](#), [laughing emoji](#))
- Suggested books in [Books Matter](#) (see below)

Words You Might Use

Ally: Someone who helps or stands up for someone who is being bullied or the target of bias.

Bias: An inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgment.

Identity: The qualities and beliefs that make a particular person or group different from others.

Prejudice: Judging or having an idea about someone or a group of people before you actually know them. Prejudice is often directed toward people in a certain identity group (race, religion, gender, etc.).

Symbol: A drawing, shape, or object that represents or expresses an idea, object, emotion, quality or belief.

Core Activity

[Note: For each section of the Core Activity, there are variations for students in grades K-2. For these early grades, please review the Core Activity but use the “Variation for Students in Grades K-2.”]

[If possible, begin the activity by reading aloud a picture book that includes a symbol(s) such as [Grace for President](#), (U.S. symbols) [The Smallest Girl in the Smallest Grade](#) (hand up symbol), [That Flag](#) (confederate flag) and [Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag](#) (LGBTQ+ pride flag). Reading a book aloud to open the activity is highly recommended, especially for students in grades K-2. After reading, engage students in a general discussion about the book and explore the symbol(s) that appear in the book, the meaning of those symbols and their impact, both positive and negative. Most of these books contain a discussion guide on ADL’s Books Matter website.]

First, engage students in an exploration of symbols. Ask students: *What is a symbol?* Elicit/explain that a symbol is a drawing, shape, or object that represents or expresses an idea, object, emotion, quality or belief. Project the [Symbols](#) on the board or wall, one at a time. After showing each symbol, ask: *What is the symbol? How does this symbol make you feel? Is it positive (makes you feel good), negative (makes you feel bad) or neutral (not positive or negative)? Where do you see this symbol?* Explain that symbols can be very useful, important and even powerful. We see them all around us. Share that the symbols we just looked at were either positive or neutral, but there can also be negative symbols or hate symbols. Ask: *Have you ever seen a hate symbol?* Share that a hate symbol expresses bias, prejudice or hate. Explain that hate symbols target specific groups of people (e.g., people who are Jewish, people who are Black, people who are immigrants) and spreads prejudice and hate through that symbol.

[Note: If your students are familiar with hate symbols such as the swastika, confederate flag, “okay” hand gesture or noose, you can reference those as examples of hate symbols. Do not draw them or share pictures of them. You can explain that these hate symbols target a group of people or express bias/hatred toward a specific group of people (e.g., a swastika targets people who are Jewish).

[Variation for students in grades K-2: Read one of the books above or another book that includes symbols. Explain what a symbol is rather than asking students to define the word. Show less of the symbols and focus mostly on how students feel when they see that symbol.]

Next, read some or all of the following statements about hate symbols aloud and invite students to move to one side of the room or the other (designate one side for “Agree,” one side for “Disagree” and the middle if they are unsure). After positioning themselves, ask one or two students in each section of the room to explain why they moved to that section.

- I see and use symbols every day, either in person, online or both.
- Hateful symbols do not bother me.
- I often see hate symbols online/in digital spaces.
- When I see a hate symbol, it makes me feel bad but I don’t know what to do.
- Hate symbols bother some people more than others.

- When we see hate symbols, we should do something about it.
- If some people find a symbol biased or hateful and others do not, we should get rid of that symbol.

Reconvene students and engage them in a discussion by asking:

- Was it difficult or easy to decide which part of the room to move to?
- What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about others?
- Did you ever want to change positions after hearing what others said? Please explain.
- What did you notice? What do you wonder?
- How do some symbols cause hurt (make you feel bad)? How do some symbols help (make you feel good or help)?

[Variation for students in grades K-2: If students are unfamiliar with hate symbols, instead use symbols or emojis like crying face, sad face, angry face, thumbs down, circle with line through it, etc. Invite students to share how they feel when they see that symbol or emoji. Ask students if they know what a hate symbol is. Refer back to a book you read that may have had a hate symbol. Explain that a hate symbol is a symbol that is meant to make a group of people feel bad about their identity. Explain this could be their race, gender, religion, culture etc.]

Finally, have students consider the impact of hate symbols by inviting them to turn and talk with a person sitting near them. You may want to model answering the questions yourself first. Give pairs 1-2 minutes each to respond to the following questions:

- Have you ever seen a hate symbol and if so, what was it?
- What did you think or feel when you saw it?
- How do you think it made others feel who saw it, especially those who identify in the group targeted by the hate (i.e., Jewish people and a swastika)?

After students talk in pairs, reconvene the class/group and ask if anyone wants to share their thoughts with the whole class. Then ask students: *How do hate symbols cause hurt, pain or harm to individuals? How do they cause pain and harm to our community (school, town, neighborhood, city) and society as a whole? Ask them to start their responses with one of the following: "It makes me think..." or "It makes me feel..." or "It makes me wonder..." and record their responses on the board/smart board.*

[Variation for students in grades K-2: Ask students if they've ever seen a hate symbol or heard people talking about a hate symbol. Ask: How did you feel when you saw it or how do you think other people felt when they saw it? Elicit/explain with students that hate symbols can make people have a lot of different feelings. Ask what feelings and share that hate symbols can make people feel sad, mad, disappointed, worried, scared or something else. Elicit a variety of thoughts and feelings from students.]

Do a quick closing where students name one symbol that is the opposite of a hate symbol. This could be a symbol that spreads a message of love, friendship, belonging or allyship. (See optional follow-up activity below for a more extensive exploration of these types of symbols.)

[Note: Share with students that if they see a hate symbol in their class, school or community, they should tell a teacher, parent, family member or another trusted adult.]

Optional Follow-Up/ Going Further

Note: These additional activities can be done as follow-ups to the core activity and they can also serve as an additional NPFH activity if the core activity is completed first.

- Following up from the closing from the Core Activity, invite students to create an original symbol that is about and expresses the opposite of what hate symbol express. The symbol and message could be about inclusivity, love, friendship, belonging, diversity, allyship, empathy, equality and justice. After creating their symbols using art materials or digital tools (if possible), have students create a short artist statement that describes their symbol, how they made it and what it means. Hang the symbols around school and consider making a video about all the symbols to share with the school community.
- Engage students in exploring what can be done to address and prevent hate symbols. Ask students: *What can we do about hate symbols? How can we prevent them from happening in the first place? How can we help people understand their impact?* Explore different ideas and actions that students come up with of what they can do either as individual, school, community or online. If needed, provide examples of actions. You can stop there after exploring ideas but if time permits, use the Hate Symbol Action Plan Worksheet in the [lesson plan](#) to begin to devise a plan of action to undertake as a class or whole school.
- Engage students in a discussion about the roles we play when we see prejudice, bias and hate, including hate symbols. Those roles are target, bystander, aggressor and ally. Emphasize that acting as an ally is a way to do something about the prejudice, bias or hate you see or experience. Talk with students about what it means to act as an ally. Hand out or project the [6 Ways to be an Ally chart](#), explaining and eliciting each of the six ways. Elicit and/or provide examples for each of the six ways as they relate to hate symbols. For older students, have them write a short paragraph about a time they acted as an ally or may do so in the future as it relates to hate symbols. Younger students can draw a picture or can share their ideas verbally.

Home Connection (Optional)

Share ADL's Table Talk [Hate Symbols](#) with families. (Note that this Table Talk is geared towards students age 13 and up, but can be adjusted for younger children.)

How Activity Meets NPFH Requirements

Students will understand the power of hate symbols to cause harm and spread bias to people in marginalized communities and will reflect on what they can do about it. Because bias incidents in communities and schools often includes hate symbols, discussing hate symbols and what to do about them will contribute to a classroom and school climate that is more safe, inclusive and respectful.

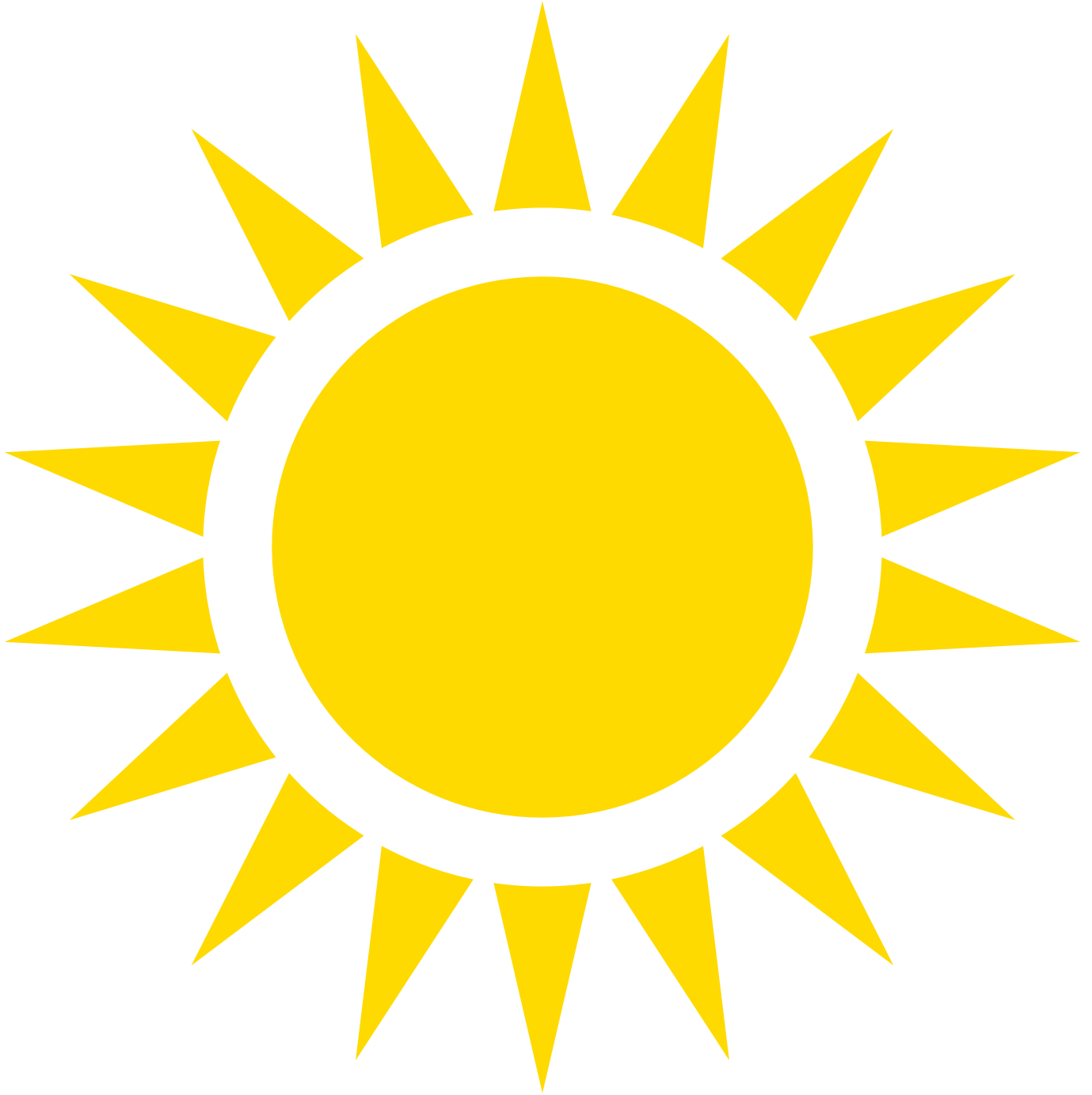














6 WAYS TO BE AN ALLY

Here are some simple things you can do to be an ally to targets of name-calling and bullying. And remember—always think about your safety first when deciding the best way to respond.

1. Support targets, whether you know them or not.

Show compassion and encouragement to those who are the targets of bullying behavior by asking if they're okay, going with them to get help and letting them know you are there for them. Ask what else you can do and make sure they know they're not alone.

2. Don't participate.

This is a really easy way to be an ally because it doesn't require you to actually do anything, just to not do certain things—like laugh, stare or cheer for the bad behavior. By refusing to join in when name-calling and bullying occur, you are sending a message that the behavior is not funny and you are not okay with treating people that way. The next step is to speak up and try to put a stop to the hurtful behavior.

3. Tell aggressors to stop.

If it feels safe, tell the person behaving disrespectfully to cut it out. You can let them know you don't approve on the spot or later during a private moment. Whenever you do it, letting aggressors know how hurtful it is to be bullied may cause them to think twice before picking on someone again.

4. Inform a trusted adult.

Sometimes you may need extra help to stop the bullying. It's important to tell an adult who you trust so that this person can be an ally to you as well as the target. Telling an adult when you see someone engaged in bullying is never "tattling" or "snitching." So don't think twice—reach out to a parent, teacher, guidance counselor, coach or someone else who will get involved.

5. Get to know people instead of judging them.

Appreciate people for who they are and don't judge them based on their appearance. You may even find that they're not so different from you after all.

6. Be an ally online.

Bullying happens online, too, and through the use of cell phones. Looking at mean web pages and forwarding hurtful messages is just like laughing at someone or spreading rumors in person. It is just as hurtful, even if you can't see the other person's face. All the rules above are just as important to follow when texting and on social media. So online and offline—do your part to be an ally to others.

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