

THE TROUBLE WITH STEREOTYPES

Lesson for Upper Elementary Students

Purpose:

To provide an opportunity for students to examine how people develop stereotypes and to consider how stereotypes can lead to prejudice and other hate behaviors.

Materials Needed:

Board/Smart board or chart paper, markers, paper, pens or pencils

Time:

20–30 minutes

Directions:

1. Provide students with a sheet of blank paper and tell them that you will be reading aloud a series of words. Instruct them to write each word on their paper, followed by the first word that comes to mind when they think of a person in that role. Encourage students to just write down the first response that comes to them without editing their initial thoughts.
2. Read the following words aloud, one at a time, allowing enough time after reading each word for students to write down their “first thoughts” about a person in that role.
 - athlete
 - teacher
 - doctor
 - immigrant
 - grandparent
 - police officer
 - teenager
 - scientist
 - cheerleader
 - dancer

After completing this step, ask students to turn their papers face down on their desks until later in the activity.

3. Divide students into small groups of 3–4 people per group and provide a sheet of blank paper to each group. Select two words from the above list and assign one to half the groups and the other to the remaining groups. Ask groups to spend the next five minutes creating a list of as many characteristics as possible that relate to a person in that role.
4. Reconvene the group and ask groups, one at a time, to share their list. As they do, make two lists on the board/smart board or on chart paper, one for each assigned role that includes all of the characteristics they identified.
5. Lead a brief discussion regarding these lists by asking the following questions:
 - Are these lists accurate? In what ways might they be inaccurate?
 - Do you believe that the characteristics you included on your list are true for all people who are [assigned role]?

- Which things on your list could be considered assumptions (i.e., things that you believe to be true without having any proof)?
6. Provide the following definition of **stereotype**:

A **stereotype** is a generalization about a person or group of people without considering individual differences. Even when a stereotype about a group is based on a seemingly positive characteristic, it can have a negative impact when people assume that it is true for all members of the group.
 7. Based on this definition, ask students whether the characteristics they listed could cause people to develop stereotypes about people who were part of these groups. Have them turn over their papers and repeat this process for their “initial thoughts” about the groups that were read aloud in step #2.
 8. Lead a brief discussion, using some or all of the following questions:
 - a. In what ways has what we’ve learned about stereotypes caused you to reconsider some of your initial thoughts?
 - b. Seeing as you all responded to the same words, do you think that many of your “initial thoughts” would be similar? Why or why not?
 - c. How do people learn stereotypes?
 - d. What are some examples of stereotypes that you have heard recently because of [a current event in the news]?
 - e. What are some ways you could respond to these stereotypes?