

No Place for Hate[®] Activity Library

Identity: What We Can See and Not See

Lesson Plan and Overview

Lesson Plan: Identity Iceberg Mini-Lesson

There are many parts to a person's identity, including the social identity groups to which they belong (race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc.). Some parts of identity—and the differences between people—are easy to see and some are not. When you first meet a person, you may think you can see and know the various aspects of their identity. However, many aspects of one's identity are not visible when you first meet or engage with another person. An iceberg is a helpful metaphor to use when exploring this with children. You can only see a small part of an iceberg (about 13%) that is above the waterline. Like an iceberg, there is only a small part of someone's identity that is clearly visible and apparent. The iceberg helps us understand that we must go "below the waterline" to see the fullness of who people are.

Grade Level

Grades K-5

Learning Objectives

- Students will explore the various parts of identity that make up who we are.
- Students will understand that when you first meet someone, you can only see certain parts of their identity.
- Students will reflect on their own identity and create an identity iceberg about themselves, or as a class/group.

Materials Needed

- [Identity Iceberg](#) student mini-lesson
- [Identity Iceberg Worksheet](#)

Words You Might Use

Bias: A preference either for or against an individual or group that affects fair judgment.

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

Stereotype: The false idea that all members of a group are the same and think and behave in the same way.

Core Activity

First, explore what identity means. Ask students: *What is identity?* Elicit/explain the definition of **identity** as follows: “The qualities and beliefs that make a particular person or group different from others.” This includes race, gender, age, appearance, religion, family, community, hobbies, opinions, etc.

Ask students: *What can you see about my identity by looking at me?* As students respond with aspects of your identity, affirm those things about your identity they can see. If they name things you can’t see, point that out. Then ask: *What can’t you see or know about my identity by just looking at me?* You can provide an example (e.g., “you don’t know my religion by looking at me, unless I am wearing a religious symbol or clothing/attire.”). Then share with students some aspects of your identity that they can’t see by looking at you. Explain that some parts of our identity are easy to see or spot by just looking. Other parts of our identity take longer to see or notice, or the person would have to share that information.

Using a volunteer as an example, have students share 2-3 things they can see about that student’s identity and then have students share 2-3 things they can’t see about the person, but might like to know. If time and interest permit, have students turn and talk with someone sitting near them and have them name 2-3 things they can see and 2-3 things they can’t see by looking at the person.

Next, show the [Identity Iceberg](#) student mini-lesson but before doing so, show students a picture of an iceberg (use the worksheet below) and help students notice the part of the iceberg above the water and the part below the water. Elicit from students that the part of the iceberg above the water is much smaller than the part in the water/below the waterline. Explain to students that if you were on a boat and saw the iceberg, you would only see the part above the water, which is a small part of the whole iceberg. Explain that what they will see in the [Identity Iceberg](#) is similar about identity. There are some parts of our identity we can see just by looking, that we can see with our eyes. But many more parts of identity are below the water, which we can’t see right away.

(Please note: For K-2 students, watch screens 1-6 only. For all grades, after each screen/section, discuss what is said and meant from the mini-lesson. Young students are less likely to absorb this concept in full, but you are providing a small sample here of the concept; they will not understand it all.)

After watching, engage students in a class discussion by asking some or all the following questions:

- How is identity like an iceberg?
- If you had to explain the identity iceberg to someone, how would you explain it in your own words?

- What parts of a person’s identity can you see by looking at them? What parts of identity can’t you see?
- Why do you think it is important to learn about people beyond what you first see by looking at them?
- What are some ways we can learn about people to go beyond what we see only by looking at them?
- What was something that surprised you?
- What did you learn that you didn’t know before?
- What didn’t you understand or what do you want to know more about?

Finally, draw an identity iceberg (or project an image) on the board. Quickly go through aspects of your identity that fall above and below the waterline. (At this point, don’t focus on the aspects of identity right at the waterline, as that may be challenging for young children to grasp). For grade K-2 students, create a class identity iceberg, having students call out parts of their identity that go above the waterline (e.g., white skin, uses a wheelchair, age) and parts that go below the waterline (e.g., ethnicity, family structure, religion, hobbies). For grade 3-5 students, using the Identity Iceberg worksheet, have students draw an identity iceberg using themselves as the subject, and identifying 2-3 parts of their identity (either with words, pictures, or both) above and below the waterline. Remind them to place on the identity iceberg the parts of their identity that they feel comfortable sharing, as these will be shared with the class and/or school. When completed, have students explore their identity icebergs by either having them share in small groups or having students share with others in their class. In addition, do some schoolwide sharing by placing them on bulletin boards around the school, creating a video that pans the collection of posters, or creating a gallery in a common area for students to observe.

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.

- Re-ask students the question: *What are some ways we can learn about people to go beyond what we see only by looking at them?* Engage in a brainstorming session of ideas (e.g., “I could ask them questions,” “I could listen or observe more closely,” “I could have a playdate/hang out with them,” etc.) and record all their ideas on the board/smart board. Then have students choose one of the ideas and create a poster that shares the idea along with an illustration to go along with it. Display these around school for all members of the community to see.
- Select and read a few picture books about different identity groups. You can use ADL’s Books Matter (online collection of children’s books) [section on People, Identity and Culture](#) to select books. After reading the book(s), discuss what parts of the characters’

identity is explored in the book and what they learned about that aspect of identity by reading the book. Then explore what parts of the characters' identity was easy and clear to see and what parts of their identity were not visible or able to see. You can then brainstorm ideas for how to learn more about the characters, to go "beyond the waterline."

- Engage students in a discussion to make connections between identity and bias. Ask students to raise hands or signal in some way if they have ever seen stereotypes or bias (see definitions above) based on an aspect of someone's identity. Explain that sometimes when we don't know people, or even when we do, we make generalizations or assumptions about their identity or about them, and that often leads to bias. Explain to students that they may have experienced the bias themselves, seen it happen to others, seen it online or in the news. Examples can include being bullied, cyberbullied, called names or slurs, be excluded, be treated unfairly because of their identity, etc. After the hand-raising, have younger students (grades K-2) draw a picture about this experience and have older students (grades 3-5) write a short essay about this experience including what happened, what part of their (or someone else's identity) was targeted, how they felt, and what they or someone else did, if anything. If appropriate, share the pictures and essays with the class or school as a whole.

Home Connection

Share ADL's Table Talk [Dolls and Diversity](#) with families.

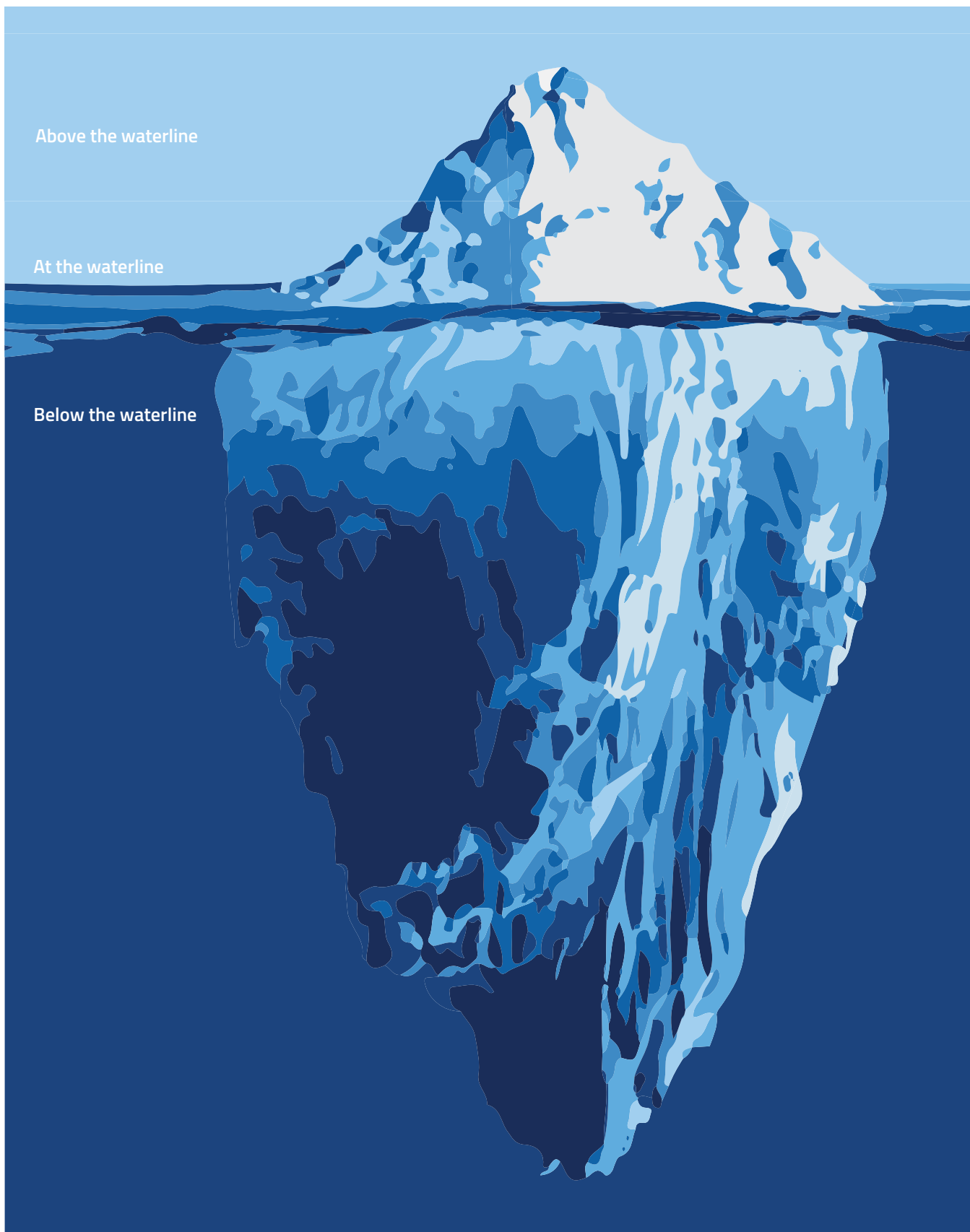
How Activity Meets NPFH Requirements

All students will discuss identity and explore how some aspects of identity are visible, and some are hard to know for sure until getting to know people. They will also reflect on their own identities and the identities of their classmates. This will contribute to a school and classroom environment where discussing identity is encouraged and students begin to make connections between identity and bias.

Virtual Variation

Engage in the first part of the activity (understanding what identity is) by discussing identity through your virtual classroom application. Have students watch the [Identity Iceberg](#) student mini-lesson with a family member. After watching, have them choose 2-3 of the questions to respond to and do so by talking with a family member or by making an audio recording of their responses. For the iceberg creating part of the activity, have students work with a friend or family member to create their own identity icebergs and for younger students, have them make a family identity iceberg.

Identity Iceberg Worksheet



Above the waterline

At the waterline

Below the waterline