

Lesson Plan and Overview

Lesson Plan: Microaggressions in Our Lives

“Microaggressions,” a term that was coined in the 1970s, are common and pervasive in our everyday lives and contribute to a culture of stereotypes, bias and exclusion. As we go about our lives, we witness and experience these “brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities—whether intentional or unintentional—which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults to people from marginalized groups.” Microaggressions are heard regularly in school, at work, in our communities and even in interactions among friends and family. Recognizing and addressing them can contribute to a culture of respect and inclusion.

Grade Level

Grades 9–12

Learning Objectives

- Students will examine what microaggressions are and how they impact people.
- Students will reflect on microaggressions that they and their peers have experienced or observed and consider strategies to counteract them.

Materials Needed

- Definition of microaggression (on board/smart board or chart paper)
- Seven MTV Microaggressions videos: [Microaggressions](#)
- Worksheet

Words You Might Use

Bias: An inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgment. Bias can be conscious (explicit or overt and intentional) or unconscious (implicit or unintentional and based on assumptions and “norms”), but both are potentially harmful regardless of intent.

Discrimination: The denial of justice, resources and fair treatment of individuals and groups (often based on social identity), through employment, education, housing, banking, political rights, etc.

Discrimination is an action that can follow prejudicial thinking.

Discrimination can be legally sanctioned (de jure) or can exist despite nondiscrimination laws or policies in place (de facto).

Stereotype: An oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences.

Core Activity

First, discuss with students what microaggressions are by eliciting/ explaining the following definition:

Microaggressions are the everyday slights, indignities, put-downs and insults that people of color, women, LGBTQ populations and other marginalized people experience in their day-to-day interactions. Microaggressions can appear to be compliments but often contain a “metacommunication” or hidden insult to the target group. Microaggressions are often outside the level of conscious awareness of the people who say them, which means they can be unintentional. Microaggressions may be communicated verbally and/or nonverbally.

Next, have students watch and discuss MTV’s “Look Different” Campaign collection of seven short videos on [Microaggressions](#). After each video, engage students in a discussion by asking: *What is happening here? What is the underlying message and/or assumption conveyed by the microaggression? How do you think the target feels? How can the target (or an ally) respond?*

After watching all the videos, ask additional discussion questions such as: *What microaggressions have you experienced, witnessed or said to others? How did it make you (or the target) feel? What message was conveyed? Why do you think MTV uses the metaphor of broken glass? Can you think of other metaphors that would work?*

Finally, have all students respond to the following reflection question prompts in writing on the attached worksheet. Then have students share their responses in pairs or triads.

- 1. What microaggression(s) have you experienced, witnessed, heard or said to others?*
- 2. What do you think is the underlying message conveyed by that microaggression?*
- 3. How did it make you feel to hear, experience or say it?*
- 4. How did you respond or what did you do or want to do?*
- 5. How can you act as an ally when you hear a microaggression?*

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.

- Use the last question in the core activity (*How can you act as an ally when you hear a microaggression?*) and have students write their response on an index card or piece of construction paper (optionally, with an illustration), without their name. Display all of the response cards/drawings in the school by either: posting them around the school on common space walls, post them on the school's website or create a video of them.
- Have a group of students (small committee, afterschool club or a class) develop and conduct a survey among students about their experiences with microaggressions. The survey can include the frequency, type, ability to respond and impact of them. After the survey is completed, the results should be shared in the school and then students can explore possible solutions/recommendations that address the findings of the survey. For example, if you find there are a lot of microaggressions directed toward a particular group in your school (Latinx students, LGBTQ students, etc.), those can be addressed specifically. Or, if you find that students overall don't have good ways to challenge stereotypes, you can work on that as a school.
- Have students keep a log for 7-10 days where they keep track of microaggressions that they have seen in real life, seen online and in media. They can keep track of the frequency, type, response and anything else they discover. The information can all be put together into a report which all members of the school committee read and make follow-up recommendations.

How Activity Meets NPFH Requirements

All students will engage in discussions about microaggressions, understand what they are and how they relate to bias, and will write/draw and share ways to act as an ally when hearing microaggressions. This will create a school-wide impact with a focus on increased respect, understanding, inclusion and equity.

