



Overcoming Stereotypes

Note to mentors: *Be cognizant that stereotypical notions may sometimes be ingrained through television, classmates, parents, teachers etc. You will be asking very provocative and controversial questions, so be prepared to hear honest, if painful or uncomfortable answers. The purpose of this lesson is to help people to discuss these issues honestly. Most of the kids probably know that stereotyping is “wrong” or “bad” but may not have been given the chance to think about why they are “bad” or where they come from. Try to anticipate certain answers, it’s important to be patient, to listen **VERY CAREFULLY** to what kids are saying, to keep the discussion going by summarizing what you’ve heard and asking for feedback on it, and by trying to include everyone in the class. **Please also remember to link the discussion to college and academic achievement.***

Feel free to deviate from this discussion outline. Somewhere in the discussion, make sure to get these key points across:

- Looking at the color of someone’s skin and making judgments about them before you know anything else about them is stereotyping. You are pre-judging them. This is prejudice.
- Racism is when you stereotype based on race (when you are prejudiced).
- Prejudice and racism are one way stereotypes get implemented in a bad way.
- There is a difference between noticing color, which is not racist, and making something negative or positive of color, which is racist.
- One reason that racism is so problematic is that people have power to act on their prejudices.
- Racism is not fair because the negative stereotypes don’t apply to everyone.

Sometimes people start to act like what they have been labeled as, which makes people think the stereotypes are true this is called a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Then, make sure they know that they are empowered to be different.

- They do not have to fit into a stereotype – especially, any negative ones
- Try not to fit others into any negative stereotypes
- Be aware when you are being stereotyped or are stereotyping
- It’s okay to be different and to befriend others who are different
- Challenge them to find out something about or meet someone from a culture, race, gender, etc that is different from theirs – be open-minded enough to learn from them.

Option I:**TIME RANGE**

- 5 to 10 minutes for the matching exercise
- 20+ minutes for discussion, depending on depth of discussion

GROUP SIZE

Small, medium or large (2 to 20+ people). Large groups may want to divide into smaller groups and compare responses.

LEARNING ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

1. Draw a line connecting each name on the list with that person's occupation (use each occupation only once; there will be some left over).
2. Share your responses. Look for patterns:
 - Did many people connect certain names with the same occupations?
 - If so, which names and occupations did your group associate with each other? Why?
3. Consider the definition of stereotype. Did any of your responses to the exercise express conscious or unconscious stereotypes you hold about various ethnic groups? If so, what were they?

DEBRIEF

Discuss the following questions in small groups, or as a class:

1. Respond to this phrase: “. . . to know one member of the group is to know them all.”
Answer the following:
 - Is this true of the ethnic group(s) to which you belong?
Why or why not?
 - It is true of other ethnic groups?
2. How would you feel (or how do you feel) to be judged based on a stereotype about your ethnic group(s)? What can you do to deal with these judgements?
3. What types of traits or characteristics are emphasized in stereotypes? Why?
4. Where do we get some of the ideas that contribute to stereotypes about people of other ethnic groups? What things reinforce those ideas? What things counteract them?
5. Did this exercise give you any new ideas? If so, what are they?
6. Will you change any of your language or behaviors as a result of this exercise? If so, how?

Go on to the discussion questions or feel free to create your own

This activity was taken from TOLERANCE.ORG.

Option II:

Game I: Stand Up/Sit Down

During the following game, you will read a series of statements out loud. Ask the students to stand if they feel a particular statement applies to them. After reading each statement, give the students a few minutes to reflect before taking their seats. Feel free to participate in the activity yourself.

Statements to be read out loud:

“Stand Up If You...”

Take the bus to school

Have more than three brothers or sisters

Are left-handed

Speak a language other than English

Like Michael Jackson

Were born outside of New York

Regularly attend religious services

Have flown on a plane

Play a musical instrument

After the game, take a couple minutes to discuss the any of the following questions

- Explain how stereotypes are formed based on having very little information. A stereotype can be formed about each of them based on any of the activities above.
- Did anyone pop-up more than once? When we form stereotypes, often we don't realize that people don't fit into the box we put them in. They are different than we expect. For instance, who would have guessed that the person who rides the bus to school has also taken a plane? An assumption could have been made that this individual is afraid of planes and likes to travel by ground only.
- Define stereotype.
 - *A stereotype is a generalization we make about a group of people. It's an oversimplified image of a person: a category that we put people in based on one, two, or a few obvious characteristics when we don't know the person.*
 - *When you stereotype a person, you make assumptions about them before getting to know them. A lot of times, these assumptions are negative and you pre-judge a person. In other words, you have prejudices.*
 - *For example, if all the people who took the bus to school were considered stupid just because they took the bus to school, that would be a stereotype. Obviously, this would be untrue – so are many stereotypes.*
- What is an example of a stereotype? If they can't come up with one, lead them with these.
 - *Yale students are rich. Girls care about clothes and boys care about sports. Women are bad drivers. White people can't dance. Black people are good at basketball.*

Go on to the discussion questions or feel free to create your own

Option III:

Game II: Get Stereotyped: The Stereotypin' Game

Tell the students that you need four volunteers to attend an imaginary party. You will tape a card to the volunteers' foreheads so they can't see it, then the rest of the class will treat the volunteers according to the stereotype attached to their heads. The volunteers will have to guess how they have been labeled.

The stereotype cards should read:

- Football Player
- Nerd/Teacher's Pet
- Cheerleader
- Popular Kid

Choose students who DO NOT match the stereotypes. For example, choose the most macho boy with his hand raised for the cheerleader role. No student should actually be stereotyped against.

Set up ground rules: no insulting, no physical contact, people who do not have a stereotype card should stay in their seats.

Have each student enter the "party" one at a time. The rest of the students should treat the party-goer according to the stereotype on his/her forehead.

After each student figures out what is taped to their head, ask them how it felt to be stereotyped against. Is it fun? Is it fair?

- *Because this is a game, sometimes students will say that it didn't bother them to be stereotyped against. You may need to prod, "But when you were up here and everyone was laughing at you and you didn't know why and really, it wasn't even true...how did it make you feel? How would it make you feel if this were real and happened every day?"*

Try to point out an example of how someone being stereotyped against in this game started to act like that stereotype said they should. Ask for some other examples of how this happens in real life.

- *For example, if everyone thinks students who get good grades are nerds and like to be alone, then a student who gets good grades might start to hang out alone because everyone says that's what they do.*
- *For example, if someone is told that since they are good at sports, they're not smart, then they might stop studying and appear to be stupid.*

After the game

A. Ask the students about difference, relating back to the game.

1. Is there anything inherently bad about any of the differences?
2. What can be good about people being different?

Follow this game with a discussion:

- What did you notice about your classmates during this game?

- *That everyone is different.*
- What are some ways that people are different?
 - *Examples from the game, plus where they live, skin color, their jobs, etc.*
- Is there anything that is necessarily bad about any of these differences?
- Would you know all these things about your classmates just by the way they look or act when you first meet them?

Definitions

- Ask the students to come up with a definition of the word “stereotype”.
 - *A stereotype is a generalization we make about a group of people. It’s an oversimplified image of a person: a category that we put people in based on one, two, or a few obvious characteristics when we don’t know the person.*
 - *When you stereotype a person, you make assumptions about them before getting to know them. A lot of times, these assumptions are negative and you pre-judge a person. In other words, you have prejudices.*
 - *For example, if all the people who took the bus to school were considered stupid just because they took the bus to school, that would be a stereotype. Obviously, this would be untrue – so are many stereotypes.*
- What is an example of a stereotype?
 - *Yale students are rich. Girls care about clothes and boys care about sports. Women are bad drivers. White people can’t dance. Black people are good at basketball.*

Go on to the discussion questions or feel free to create your own

Please make sure you talk about question 15.

Option IV.
Personal Experiences

- A. Ask the students to come up with a definition of the word “stereotype”.
- *A stereotype is a generalization we make about a group of people. It’s an oversimplified image of a person: a category that we put people in based on one, two, or a few obvious characteristics when we don’t know the person.*
 - *When you stereotype a person, you make assumptions about them before getting to know them. A lot of times, these assumptions are negative and you pre-judge a person. In other words, you have prejudices.*
 - *For example, if all the people who took the bus to school were considered stupid just because they took the bus to school, that would be a stereotype. Obviously, this would be untrue – so are many stereotypes.*

What is an example of a stereotype?

- *Yale students are rich. Girls care about clothes and boys care about sports. Women are bad drivers. White people can’t dance. Black people are good at basketball.*
- B. Ask students to relate any personal experiences they have had or stories they have heard related to prejudice with the group.
- C. Ask students to share any stereotypes they may be familiar with. Ask questions:
1. Why do people think this way?
 2. Where do you think they might learn this type of behavior?
 3. What are some ways we can deal with prejudiced behavior?
 4. [A point for you to make: if someone is, say, afraid of spiders, they never go near the spiders and so they never realize that spiders aren’t so scary after all. A way to end stereotypes is to get to know someone that you stereotype – you will realize that there is much more to them than the stereotype, and once you get to know them, they won’t be so scary. This is key.]
- D. Discuss the students’ personal contact with racial stereotypes within their race and outside of it. Ask how these stereotypes fit in with facts they know about their race.
- Ask students to come up with stereotypes of girls and boys within their gender and outside of it. Ask how these stereotypes fit in with facts they know about boys and girls.
 - Where stereotypes come from: “Why do you think people say/think things like this about other people?”
- E. Ask students to discuss whether or not they experience stereotypes at school. If so, by whom? How does stereotyping at school affect their academic experience (e.g. does it make them want to ignore a teacher or not go to a class)

Go on to the discussion questions or feel free to create your own
Please make sure you talk about question 15.

Discussions Questions:

If they say all negative things:

1. Are stereotypes always negative?
 - a. No. For example, there are common stereotypes that Asian people are good at math, that girls are good dancers, and that black men are good at basketball.
2. So is it ok to have positive stereotypes?
 - a. Even though it is a positive stereotype, it is still not always true, and can also be hurtful.
3. How can a positive stereotype be hurtful?
 - a. If a person is limited to what they're supposed to be good at by their stereotypes, then that's hurtful. For example, an Asian artist could have a hard time finding a job painting because people might think their talent is math, not art.
4. Do you use these stereotypes in your everyday judgments?
5. What are some stereotypes you make about other races or ethnic groups?
6. What are some judgments you make about men, women, disabled, the elderly, people with glasses, people who attend church, football players, cheerleaders, homosexuals, black people who listen to rock music, white people who listen to hip hop, etc? (Please feel free to add anything to this list.)
7. Is it okay to stereotype people?
 - a. Yes. For example, if you're in a foreign country, it would be useful to assume that a stranger you meet will probably follow the country's customs, so you can behave appropriately.
 - b. Make the point that some generalizations can be good and helpful but that successful people realize the stereotypes they have and don't let them apply in every situation.
8. Where do stereotypes come from?
 - a. Television, news, family, etc.
9. What does a stereotype have to do with conflict?
 - a. People can get into conflicts because they stereotype (make untrue assumptions); also stereotypes limit communication and that makes conflicts worse.
10. Are stereotypes always true? Are stereotypes ever true?
 - a. In order to be true, they would have to hold for EVERY SINGLE member of the group all of the time!
 - b. Most people don't fit into stereotypes. If everyone or almost everyone in this class does not fit into a stereotype that they're labeled as, then most people probably don't fit neatly into stereotypes.
11. What's a way to get rid of stereotypes?
 - a. If you get to know someone, you'll find out that they don't fit into stereotypes.
 - b. Asking people questions about themselves also helps you see them as individuals with unique interests, not as representatives of their stereotyped groups.

- c. Communication! Communication can help you get rid of stereotypes; similarly, good communication is impossible when you stereotype!
12. What can the people who get stereotyped do to get rid of those stereotypes?
 - a. Show people that the stereotypes aren't true.
 13. What happens when people don't get rid of stereotypes, for example, based on skin color?
 - a. Racism. Classism. Just a general desire to keep out those who are not like you
 14. Why is this damaging on a college campus?
 - a. You can miss out on opportunities to learn from others, to see different things – other cities, countries, activities
 15. Do you think racism exists on only predominantly white college campuses?
 - a. Absolutely not, as can be seen from the article, this can definitely happen at an HBCU, black people can stereotype each other as well.
 16. Discuss why is stereotyping so damaging in general
 - a. *One reason that stereotyping is so problematic is that some people have power to act on their prejudices, like pulling over black men on the highway or in white neighborhoods*
 - b. *If someone is being labeled as something, they might think they're going to get in trouble for whatever it is anyway, so they might as well do it.*
 17. How can stereotypes be avoided?
 - a. Remember self-respect and respecting others.

Please make sure you talk about question 15.