

Reducing Prejudice³⁰

Class Time Needed: 40 minutes

Materials

“Reducing Prejudice” worksheets for each student

Objectives

- Students will be able to define prejudice.
- Students will identify alternatives to prejudiced behavior.

Introduction

Gordon Allport defines prejudice as “an attitude in a closed mind.” In a closed mind, an attitude is cut off from new information. At its least dangerous level, prejudice is a filter that keeps one person from seeing beyond a stereotypical image. When a prejudiced person takes an action that prevents another person or a group from exercising Constitutional or human rights, then discrimination is at work. “Reducing Prejudice” is designed to call attention to intolerant behaviors that are the starting point of discrimination and to help students practice alternatives to prejudice.

Procedure

1. Distribute copies of the worksheet, “Reducing Prejudice,” and have students take turns reading or acting out the “What Happened” scenarios on the worksheet. Then, lead a discussion about ways in which we are different from one another.
2. Ask students to consider whether these differences are reasons to fear or dislike one another.
3. For each scenario on the worksheet, have students explain their answers to the following questions.
 - How have the students in this situation behaved?
 - Have you ever seen behavior like this?
 - How are the students in this situation dealing with differences? Is this behavior unusual? Is it acceptable?
 - How do you think the students who have been picked on feel?
 - Have you ever had negative thoughts or reactions to people who are different from you? Why did it happen?
4. Explain that prejudice means judging someone before you really know that person. People are prejudiced when they judge other people solely on traits such as skin color, gender, religion, or social group.
5. Continue the discussion by asking the following.
 - Why is each scenario an example of prejudice?
 - Have you ever experienced prejudice? Explain.
6. Discuss ways in which people can be hurt by prejudice.
7. Divide the class into cooperative groups and direct the students’ attention to the worksheet scenarios again. Ask each group to devise and role-play different endings for each situation that shows tolerance for differences and reduces prejudice. Point out that some situations present positive alternatives that the students can handle themselves. Other situations may require the help of an adult.

Debriefing

Use the following questions to help students find positive alternatives to intolerance.

1. How does it feel when someone makes fun of you or leaves you out of an activity because you are different?
2. What happened in the scenarios that demonstrated intolerance and prejudice? (Possible answers: Feelings were hurt, people were left out of activities, there was violence.)
3. What happened when you worked with your group to come up with better endings? How easy was it to think of different ways to handle these situations? What does this tell you?
4. What did you learn from this activity?
5. Have you ever experienced or witnessed situations similar to these? How did you react? Why do you think people are prejudiced?
6. What if we were all alike? Would the world be better? Would discrimination end?
7. What are some things you can do to reduce prejudice and discrimination? How comfortable would you feel doing the things you suggested in your “better ending” scenarios?

Extending the Ideas

- Have students write additional scenarios based on their own experiences with prejudice and stereotyping. Have them role-play positive alternatives to these situations.
- Carol Rogers³¹ offers this advice to students who want to take positive action against prejudice and stereotyping: *“Don’t be afraid to ask someone about their differences. Then, really listen.”* Kevin Webb, who served in Panama from 1993 to 1995, makes a similar suggestion: *“When I was a Peace Corps Volunteer, I would ask [about differences] in a respectful way. Not just anyone, but someone I was developing a relationship with. I would just say, ‘I don’t understand why you do this or why you say this . . . maybe you could help me to understand.’”*
- Help students identify some positive steps they can take as individuals to get to know people who are different from themselves. Here are some ideas.
 - Make an effort to get to know someone of a different culture, race, age, or religion.
 - Spend time with an elderly person or a person with a disability.
 - Invite someone new to join your friends in an activity.
 - Ask someone from a different cultural or religious group if you can participate in a special event, such as Kwanzaa, Chinese New Year, or Passover.
- Consider extending the learning into a service project. Work with your students to conduct a needs assessment to find out how students can help in the school or community by direct service, e.g., tutoring or volunteering at a home for the elderly; indirect service, e.g., collections, fund-raisers or clean-ups; or advocacy, e.g., lobbying or public performances. See the Service-Learning Rubric in the introduction to this book to help devise a project that includes curriculum, service, and reflection.



"Reducing Prejudice" Worksheet

Directions: *Read or act out each of the "What Happened" scenarios below. Discuss the situations with your teacher. Then work in cooperative groups to find a better ending for each situation.*

What Happened

1. A new student arrives at school wearing the dress of her native country. The other children make fun of her and call her a weirdo. No one wants to sit next to her.

A Better Ending

1. A new student arrives at school wearing the dress of her native country . . .

What Happened

2. A student's father has told him that all people of a certain race are bad. The student gets a friend to join him in picking on children of that race. One day, a terrible fight breaks out in the school yard and several students are hurt.

A Better Ending

2. A student's father has told him that all people of a certain race are bad . . .



What Happened

3. Several boys sign up for an intramural field hockey team. The girls refuse to play with them.

A Better Ending

3. Several boys sign up for an intramural field hockey team . . .

What Happened

4. Several students attend a special class for gifted students. In the school cafeteria, other students call them nerds and make fun of them.

A Better Ending

4. Several students attend a special class for gifted students . . .

What Happened

5. In the locker room, a male student is upset and crying. A group of five other boys tease him and call him a sissy. They exclude him from their plans for a camp-out.

A Better Ending

5. In the locker room, a male student is upset and crying . . .



Fighting Words With Words³²

Class Time Needed: 30 minutes

Materials

- Examples of sweeping generalizations and balancing statements written on individual strips of paper
- Small weights (such as spools or small blocks of wood) to attach to each paper strip
- A two-sided scale
- Copies of “Fighting Words With Words”

Objectives

- Students will recognize the faulty thinking behind stereotypes and sweeping generalizations.
- Students will practice using balancing statements to counteract stereotypes and sweeping generalizations.

Introduction

“Fighting Words with Words” provides students with some simple tools to use when confronted with the prejudicial statements of others.

Procedure

1. Prepare for the activity by writing examples of sweeping generalizations and balancing statements (see examples below) on individual strips of paper. Tape each strip to a small weight. You will use the two-sided scale to show students how balancing statements can “balance” sweeping generalizations.

Generalization

Elderly people are afraid to try new things.

Balancing Statement

My grandmother just bought a computer. She loves using e-mail!

Generalization

People with physical disabilities can't play sports.

Balancing Statement

Former New York Yankee pitcher Jim Abbott was born with only one hand.

2. Review the meaning of “stereotype” and “sweeping generalization” with your students.

stereotype: *a preconceived belief that is applied to all members of a specific group. For example, a statement such as “Let’s get Kyle to play on the basketball team. He’s the tallest kid in the class” expresses a stereotype. The speaker assumes that all tall people like to play basketball.*

sweeping generalization: *a statement like “All tall people like to play basketball.” This suggests all members of a group are alike.*

3. Place a sweeping generalization on one side of the scale. Point out that sweeping generalizations give a one-sided or unbalanced view of a person or group. Then balance the scale by placing a counter or “balancing” statement on the other side. Ask students to describe the purpose of a balancing statement.

4. Place additional examples of sweeping generalizations and balancing statements on the scale. Point out the particular strategy being used in each balancing statement you place on the scale. (Examples: “This statement gives specific rather than general information” and “This statement politely disagrees.”)

5. Have students work with partners to come up with the sweeping generalizations behind the balancing statements given in “Fighting Words with Words.” For example, if the balancing statement is “I just don’t agree with you that girls don’t do as well as boys in math. That hasn’t been our class’s experience at all,” then the original statement could have been something like “Girls aren’t good at math.”

Debriefing

Use the following questions to help students find ways to use balancing statements when they hear sweeping generalizations or stereotypes.

1. How does it feel when you hear a sweeping generalization such as “All kids are lazy”?
2. What did you learn from this demonstration? What effect do sweeping generalizations and stereotypes have on people?
3. Have you ever heard a friend or a family member use a stereotype to describe an individual or a group of people? How could you use balancing statements when this happens?
4. What are some other strategies you can use to counteract “unbalanced” thinking about other people?

Extending the Ideas

- Have students make a list of sweeping generalizations and stereotypes they have heard. Ask them to work in groups to come up with counter statements to balance each statement. Share these with the entire class.

- Have students work with partners to write examples of situations that involve the use of sweeping generalizations and stereotypes. Then ask each pair to write a dialogue of a discussion that includes balancing statements. Have the groups perform their dialogues for the class and ask the class members to identify the balancing statements used in each scenario.



- Share the following description of a Peace Corps Volunteer’s experience in his host country with your students. This anecdote provides a good opportunity to help your students understand that prejudice is not always a factor in situations where people from different cultures come together.

I would ride a bus from the capital out to a small town where I would catch another bus out to the village up in the mountains. I noticed that if I got on the bus and it wasn't very crowded, all the other seats on the bus would fill up before someone would sit beside me because I was different—I was the one white person on the bus. People naturally are going to gravitate toward what they know and what they are comfortable with. . . . I learned really quickly that they weren't [choosing other seats] because they hated white people. I was different and they were naturally going to go to where they felt comfortable first. My seat would usually be the last to fill up and I often had wonderful conversations with whomever ended up sitting next to me.

-Kevin Webb

- Have students work in cooperative groups to design posters that illustrate the nine types of balancing statements identified in the “Fighting Words with Words” worksheet. Post the whole set in a public place, such as the school cafeteria or a hallway.

Fighting Words With Words

We can do many things to act against stereotypes. One easy thing we can do is to change the way we talk about other people, particularly when we don't know them very well. In our everyday discussions with friends and classmates, we can use words and phrases that give a balanced view of others. Sentences that give another point of view are called "balancing statements."

Directions: Below are some examples of stereotypes and balancing statements. Can you identify the sweeping generalizations that are behind the stereotypes?

1. Think about or share opposite examples when someone makes a sweeping generalization.

They say: *Sri Lankans have long, straight hair.*

You say: *Two of my Sri Lankan friends have short hair that's permed.*

Generalization:

2. Give specific rather than general information about people.

My new friend from Jamaica enjoys rock music and country music, not just reggae. He is interested in playing in the orchestra, but he also wants to try out for the volleyball team.

Generalization:

3. Point out the good or positive things about others.

When I was a Volunteer, most people in Nepal went out of their way to help strangers.

Generalization:



4. Share cultural information.

George isn't eating the sausages because his family practices Islam. Did you know that people who practice Islam usually don't eat pork?

Generalization:

5. Actively question (even just to yourself) the reliability of the source of information.

I wonder if John really knows what the Honduran people are like. He was there for only a few days. Maybe he or someone he knows just had a bad experience.

Generalization:

6. Politely disagree.

Really, I just don't agree with you that girls don't do as well as boys in math. That hasn't been true in our class.

Generalization:

7. Point out that what may be true for some is not necessarily true for all.

I know a lot of people in Senegal are farmers, but they don't all live in the country, nor do they all become farmers. In fact, many work in the cities or go to the university and study for advanced degrees.

Generalization:

8. Wait before making a judgment.

Think to yourself: That girl seems really stuck-up to me, but I'd better wait to form an opinion about her. Maybe she just doesn't speak English very well yet. Or maybe she's shy.

Generalization:

