

## The Multicultural Person<sup>12</sup>

**Class time needed:** 20 minutes

### Materials

No materials needed

### Objectives

- Students will identify themselves as members of many different groups.
- Students will observe differences without making value judgments.

### Introduction

Each of us belongs to many groups that function in ways similar to larger cultures. This exercise can be used to teach elementary school children about the many groups to which they belong. It attempts to teach the notion of differences in a neutral framework without evaluating those differences as being either good or bad.

### Procedure

1. The teacher should prepare for this activity by developing three lists of neutral characteristics that would be likely to divide the group. The first list should include characteristics related to objects worn or carried by the students, e.g., those wearing black shoes/brown shoes/other-colored shoes; those wearing red/those not wearing red; those with backpacks/those without backpacks. The second list may include more personal characteristics, such as hair color, eye color, birth month, or food and activity preferences. The third set will contain more obvious cultural differences, such as gender, national background, and race. The lists should be appropriate for the students in the class and designed in such a way that students are not singled out in embarrassing ways.
2. Move desks and chairs off to one side of the room to clear a large area in the center of the floor.
3. Assemble the students into a large group in the center of the room. Ask students to name a few characteristics that they all have in common (e.g., all of the students live in the same community and are members of a particular class in school). Help students identify ways that these characteristics set them apart from other groups. For example, all of the students in the school may be expected to follow a particular set of rules. All of the fifth grade students may take part in an annual field trip.
4. Then give a series of instructions that will divide the group according to items on the first list, such as: "All those wearing red move to the right side of the room, and all those not wearing red move to the left side of the room."
5. Reassemble the large group and continue to issue instructions that will divide the group in a series of ways.
6. After the group has become familiar with the exercise, move toward the more personal differences related to the second list.
7. End the exercise by using characteristics from the third list.



## Debriefing

Use the following questions to focus discussion around racial/cultural difference being just one of the significant components that define us.

1. How did it feel to learn that each of you is a member of many different groups? Were you surprised by the number of groups to which you belong?
2. How did you feel about being put into a group based on characteristics you couldn't change (e.g., eye color and hair color)?
3. What happened when we started dividing the class into subgroups according to the color of their clothing or shoes? What comments did you or your classmates make?
4. What did you learn by doing this exercise?
5. What do you think about judging individuals according to the color of their shoes or by what kind of food they like?
6. How does this exercise relate to how you get along with people? What kind of judgments do you make about people? How are your judgments similar to or different from food or clothing preferences?
7. What if we had done this exercise by giving different treatment to certain groups? How would you feel? How might other people in the group feel?
8. How can we use what we learned during this exercise in real life?

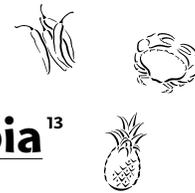
## Extending the Ideas

- Point out to students that each of us typically can identify with a number of groups. Provide several examples, such as “people who speak Spanish,” or “people who like to eat fish.” Have students brainstorm additional examples of groups. Then, ask students to list on a sheet of paper 10 groups to which they belong. Have students arrange the items on their lists in a hierarchy from the group with largest number of people to the smallest (e.g., from people who live on the planet Earth to people who hate French fries). Then have each student collect the signatures of other students in the class who belong to the same groups. Afterward, discuss the similarities and differences among the student lists. Did students in the class belong to many of the same groups? Do some of these groups identify members as part of a particular culture or cultures?



- This lesson could lead to a service-learning project. Discuss the multicultural nature of your class, school, and/or community. Have your students learn more about the cultures present in your area and then teach other students about them. They may make posters, bulletin boards, videos, or multimedia presentations to accomplish this. Use the Service-Learning Rubric found in the introduction to this guide to help you plan and execute a project that will have strong impact.

# Cuisine and Etiquette in Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia<sup>13</sup>



**Class time needed:** 40 minutes

## Materials

- Three readings on cuisine and etiquette in Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia
- Large sheets of paper or overhead transparencies

## Objective

- Students will make inferences about cultural norms from customs related to eating in three African countries.

## Introduction

Food is one of the most enjoyable ways to experience another culture. The focus of this activity about mealtime etiquette is on how manners reflect cultural norms. The descriptions were written by teachers from Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia. **Note: This lesson could be used to supplement content on African agriculture or climate.**

## Procedure

1. Explain the concept of “staple food,” usually a carbohydrate that is eaten daily and is a major source of calories. Ask the students to identify the staple foods of other cultures they have studied (potatoes for Ireland, rice for Japan, maize for Mexico, etc.). What is our staple food? Some students may say hamburgers, but wheat, corn, or potatoes are more accurate answers. Explain that in their readings in this lesson they will learn that rice is the staple food for most of West Africa, maize (corn) for much of Eastern and Southern Africa, and *matoke* (ma-tok-a), or cooking bananas, for Uganda.
2. Ask students to describe the table manners they are expected to observe in their homes or in the school cafeteria. Who eats together? What do you do before eating? Are there rules about your hands or the way you sit? What do you do at the end of a meal? Why do we have rules about how to eat? Have you ever been in situations where the rules you are used to don't seem to fit?
3. Introduce the countries of Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia. If the students are unfamiliar with their locations, point them out on a map of Africa.
4. Divide the class into three groups for Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia.
5. Have each group read its handout (i.e., the Zambia groups reads “Cuisine and Etiquette in Zambia”) to identify the mealtime behaviors that are considered acceptable or unacceptable in Sierra Leone, Uganda, or Zambia.
6. On large sheets of paper or overhead transparencies, each group should draw up a list of rules for mealtime that they think are observed in their assigned country. The list should include: a) roles for men, women, and children; b) proper behavior before, during, and after the meal; and c) taboos, or what not to do when eating in this country.
7. Have each group display its lists and report on its findings. As a whole class, compare etiquette among the three countries.

8. Remind students that the cultural behaviors that we can observe often provide ideas about what the group values or thinks is most important. For example, by observing that it is common for Ugandan families to say a prayer before eating, we may assume that religion is an important part of daily life. Work with the whole class to develop some ideas about the values represented by the behaviors they listed. Some examples follow.

- In Sierra Leone, if you visit a friend, he or she will almost always invite you to stay and eat. (*Possible values: sharing, hospitality*)
- In Sierra Leone, when everyone finishes eating, they wash their hands and thank the cook. (*Possible values: cleanliness, respect for adults and for work*)
- In Uganda, the responsibility of preparing the family's meals belongs solely to women and girls in the home. (*Possible value: clearly defined roles for men and women*)
- In Zambia, if visitors happen to have a meal with the family, they are given the honor of washing first. (*Possible value: guests are treated with honor*)

### Debriefing

Use the following questions to focus discussion on the meaning of culture.

1. What are some mealtime rules observed in your household that are similar to those observed in the African households described in your reading?
2. What are some mealtime habits or rules in your home that a visitor from one of these three African countries may find unusual? What could you do to make your visitor feel comfortable?
3. Zambian children learn lessons about manners from their mothers during mealtime. How did you learn what behavior is appropriate at mealtime?
4. What if you brought a guest from Sierra Leone to a fast food restaurant in the United States? What might your friend think about the type of food, the manner of serving it, and the way people eat?
5. Why are rules of etiquette so important? Whose rules do you follow when you're sharing a meal at someone's house? Whose rules do you follow in a restaurant?

### Extending the Ideas

- Simulate an African meal using the recipes provided below. Responsibilities for preparation should be divided among class members as you see fit. Some classes may prefer to prepare one dish; others may want to sample several. The easiest dish to prepare is fried plantains. Groundnut stew is simple to prepare, and Americans usually enjoy it. During the meal, follow the rules outlined in the readings as closely as possible. Following the meal, debrief the class by asking them to react to eating African style.
- Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Chris Davis who served in Guatemala from 1987 to 1989 remembers his first meal in his host country as an awkward one:

*I am trying to force down what they give me, none of it recognizable to me. Some kind of fried vegetable and small pieces of meat. The mother smiles broadly at me, turns to [scold] one of her older kids, then smiles at me again. Since I am unaware that I have to be the one to stand first, we sit at the table for over three hours.*

Encourage class members to tell their own stories about feeling awkward in a strange situation or having a hard time understanding someone else's ways of doing things. What did they learn from these experiences?

- Invite a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, an international exchange student, a recent immigrant, or students' family members to talk about food and manners in other countries.



## Cuisine and Etiquette in Sierra Leone



In Sierra Leone, the staple food is rice. “If I haven’t had my rice, I haven’t eaten today,” is a popular saying. Sierra Leoneans eat rice at least twice a day. Only women and girls prepare the food. They usually cook in big pots on a three-stone stove (three big rocks that support the pots). Firewood or charcoal is the main fuel except for some city dwellers who use gas or electricity.

If you visit a Sierra Leonean friend, he or she will almost always invite you to stay and eat. Usually the men and boys eat separately from the women and girls. Everyone washes their hands before they eat, and then they gather around in a circle with a huge dish of food placed in the middle. Sharing is an important part of life in Sierra Leone, and each person eats from the part of the big dish that is right in front of him or her. It is very bad manners to reach across the dish! Only the right hand is used for eating; the left hand is considered unclean.

When you are eating, you usually don’t talk. Talking shows a lack of respect for the food. It is rude to lean on your left hand while you are eating. People usually drink water only after a meal is over.

The oldest males get the choicest food, the best pieces of meat or fish. Then the young males take the next best pieces, and then finally the women and girls get any meat or fish that is

left. Sometimes the women and girls wait until the men and boys have had all they want before they eat.

Rice is eaten with the hands by squeezing or rolling it into a ball, dipping it into the sauce, and then popping it into the mouth. If rice falls from your fingers or mouth, you don’t put it back in the dish. When everyone finishes eating, they wash their hands and thank the cook.

Many ingredients go into sauces or stews to go with rice. The most popular sauces are made of greens, especially cassava or potato leaves. Other common ingredients include palm oil, onions, tomatoes, yams, and red peppers. Sometimes groundnut (peanut) oil or coconut oil are used. Other sources of protein that go into the sauces include groundnuts and beans, as well as fish, chicken, goat meat, or pork. Seafood, such as oysters, lobster, and crab, may also be used. Most of the calories, however, come from rice, which is eaten in large quantities.

Fruits in Sierra Leone include oranges, bananas, papaws (papayas), lemons, avocados, guava, watermelon, mangoes, and pineapples. Fruit is usually eaten as a snack. Plantains are often sliced and fried as chips for a snack. Tea and coffee are drunk in some parts of the country for breakfast. Cokes and beer are popular with many people who can afford them.





## Cuisine and Etiquette in Uganda



In Uganda, the staple food is *matooke* (cooking bananas). Other food crops include cassava (manioc), sweet potatoes, white potatoes, yams, beans, peas, groundnuts (peanuts), cabbage, onions, pumpkins, and tomatoes. Some fruits, such as oranges, papaws (papayas), lemons, and pineapples, are also grown.

Most people, except for a few who live in the city centers, produce their own food. The responsibility of preparing the family's meals belongs solely to women and girls in the home. Men and boys of age 12 and above are not even expected to sit in the kitchen, which is separate from the main house. Cooking is done on an open fire using wood for fuel.

Most families eat two meals a day. The two meals are lunch and supper. Breakfast is just a cup of tea or a bowl of porridge.

When a meal is ready, all members of the household wash their hands and sit down on [floor] mats. Hands have to be washed before and after the meal because most Ugandans eat with their hands. At mealtime everybody is welcome; visitors and neighbors who drop in are expected to join the family at a meal.

Food is served by women. They cut it up into small pieces for each member of the family. Sauce, which is usually a stew with vegetables, beans, butter, salt, and curry powder, is served to each person on a plate. Sometimes fish or beef stew is served.

Normally a short prayer is said before the family starts eating. During the meal, children talk only when asked a question. It is bad manners to reach for salt or a spoon. It is better to ask someone sitting close to it to pass it. It

is also bad manners to leave the room while others are still eating.

Everyone respects the meal by staying seated until the meal is over. Leaning on the left hand or stretching ones legs while at a meal is a sign of disrespect and is not tolerated.

People usually drink water at the end of the meal. It is considered odd to drink water while eating.

When the meal is finished, everyone in turn gives a compliment to the mother by saying, "Thank you for preparing the meal, madam." No dessert is served after the meal. Fruits like papaw, pineapple, or sweet bananas are normally eaten as a snack between meals.





## Cuisine and Etiquette in Zambia



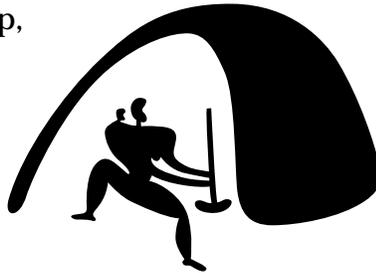
Zambia's staple food is maize (corn), and Zambians eat maize in several ways. When the corn is ripe but still green, it can be roasted and boiled. When it is dry and hard, it can be fried or boiled. It can also be pounded slightly to remove the top layer and boiled either by itself or mixed with beans or groundnuts (peanuts). At times the maize is ground to a size a little bigger than rice and is cooked as rice. Finally, we have the fine cornmeal which is called mealie-meal in Zambia. This is used for making *nsima*, the most popular meal. *Nsima* is steamed cornmeal.

Meat from cows, goats, sheep, and fish are used in sauces over *nsima*. There are also a lot of vegetables put in sauces, such as leaves from beans, okra, cow peas, pumpkins, and cassava. Other vegetables eaten almost daily include onions and tomatoes.

All the cooking is done by the wife. *Nsima* is usually prepared for lunch and dinner and not for breakfast. In a traditional setting, boys from the age of seven eat with the man.

The mother eats with the girls and the younger boys. This is because all of the children below the age of seven are under the guidance of their mother. Almost all learning takes place through daily activities in the home. The mother, who is in charge of the kids' learning, has to take care of their learning at meal time. This is changing, especially in towns and cities. The trend now is that members of the family all eat together.

Before eating, everybody washes hands in order of the status of the members of the family: father first, then mother and others follow according to their ages. One of the younger children, boy or girl, passes a water dish around for others to wash their hands. If a visitor happens to have a meal with the family, he is given the honor of washing first.



It is rude to talk very much or loudly while eating. After eating, the family members wash their hands again in the same order. The wife and the young ones clear the table. Belching after a meal used to be a compliment, but not nowadays.



## Recipes



Each recipe serves four.

### Groundnut Stew

- 1 pound peanut butter
- 1 pound chicken or meat
- 1/4 pound onions
- 1/4 pound tomatoes diced
- 1 can tomato paste
- salt and pepper
- 1 cup milk
- cayenne pepper (optional)

Cut the chicken or meat into 1-inch pieces and season with salt. Brown the meat, then add the onion, tomatoes, tomato paste, milk, and red pepper. Simmer for half an hour. Then add the peanut butter. Simmer until the sauce is very thick. Serve with rice.

### Matoke

- 10 to 20 *matoke*  
(green cooking  
bananas—plantains  
may be used)
- 5 to 7 cups water,  
depending on the  
quantity of bananas

Peel the bananas and wash them in cold water. Put into a pot, add the water, and cover. Boil for 10 minutes, then reduce the heat and continue to cook. The mixture will turn yellow when well-cooked. Drain the water. Mash the bananas with a wooden spoon. Wrap the mashed food in foil and place on a steaming basket. Place the steamer inside a large pot and add water. Steam on low heat for 20 minutes. Serve while hot.



### Nsima

- 1 cup cold water
- 3 cups hot water
- 2 to 3 cups corn meal

Boil water in a saucepan. Make a paste using some of the meal with the cup of cold water. Add the paste to hot water. Stir with a wooden spoon until thickened like porridge. Cover the saucepan and simmer for some time (about 15 minutes). Lower the heat a little. Remove the lid and gradually add corn meal, stirring constantly and flattening any lumps that may form. Continue to add meal and stir until *nsima* thickens to the desired consistency (some people like it thin, and others prefer it thick). Cover and reduce heat to very low.

Leave for a few minutes to allow further cooking. Stir the *nsima* once again and serve in a slightly wet serving dish. Cover to keep it warm. Serve with meat, poultry, fish, or vegetables.

### Fried Plantains

- 4 plantains (or green bananas)
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- peanut oil
- black pepper

Cut the bananas into slices and cover with lemon juice. Cook the slices quickly in very hot peanut oil until crisp. The bananas may be sprinkled with pepper.



## Activity Suggestions: Grades 3-5

## First Impressions

**Class time needed:** 40 minutes

### Materials

“First Impressions” worksheet for each student

### Objectives

- Students will recognize that a single observation can be misleading.
- Students will get to know one another.

### Introduction

Young children often make assumptions and judgments about people based on quick impressions. For example, a little girl noticing a house with peeling paint and an unkempt yard told her aunt, “I bet the people who live in that house are ugly.” The girl had somehow learned to make assumptions about people she had never met based on her perception of their possessions.

Given our tendency to link appearances to personality or cultural traits, the little girl’s comment is not surprising. Each of us, regardless of age, has probably experienced the embarrassment of making a faulty assumption based on scant evidence. This exercise can be used to point out the importance of making careful observations and of avoiding judgment. It also serves as a community-building activity.

### Procedure

1. To begin the activity, have students make lists of their favorite things. Tell them to keep these lists as they will be referring to them later.
2. Divide the students into groups of two. If possible, pair students who do not know each other well. Give each student a copy of the “First Impressions” worksheet.
3. Assign the following tasks.
  - Without speaking to your partner, think of at least five things you believe he or she likes (e.g., favorite color, activities, music, food). Base your ideas only on what you can learn about your partner from what you can see. List your ideas in the first column on your paper.
  - In the second column, write down the evidence that supports each of your ideas.
4. Once students have completed their lists, ask them to interview each other to find out if their observations are accurate. You may want to model the following dialogue.
 

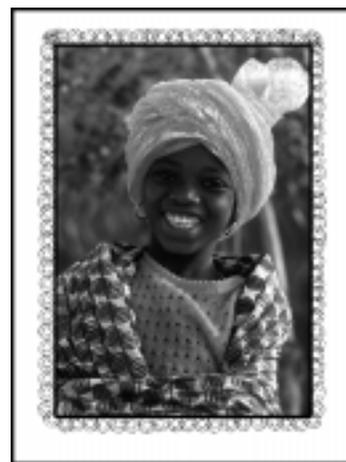
**Student A:** I see you have a Pittsburgh Steelers sticker on your notebook. You must like football.

**Student B:** No, you’re wrong. My brother is the football fan. He put these stickers on everything in the house after his favorite team won the Super Bowl.

**Student A:** But you must like to read. You have two library books with you.

**Student B:** You’re right about that. I read a lot in my spare time. Since you’re a girl, I’ll bet you like to shop.

**Student A:** Shopping is fun, but I didn’t list it as one of my favorite activities. I’d rather play computer games.



As students conduct their interviews, they should use the third column to note corrections and to add more information about their initial observations.

## Debriefing

After students have completed their interviews, bring the full class together to discuss the activity. The following questions can be used to focus the discussion.

1. How did it feel to know that someone was making guesses about the things you like without talking to you?
2. What happened when you talked with your partners about your observations? Were your original conclusions mostly right or mostly wrong? Did you find that you like similar things or different things?
3. What would you say are the important things to remember about first impressions?
4. What are some problems that can occur when people make assumptions without very much evidence?
5. What if you did this activity with someone much older than yourself or with someone from another country? How would you make accurate guesses about their favorite things?
6. What are some things you can do to make sure that your ideas about people and places are fair?

## Extending the Ideas

- Ask students to use the information gathered during their interviews to introduce their partners to other members of the class.
- Have students design posters that illustrate their partners' lists of favorite things. Displayed in the classroom, these would serve as a visual reminder of individual traits and shared interests. These displays could be updated throughout the school year as students get to know each other better.
- Invite international exchange students or Returned Peace Corps Volunteers to the class to talk about their first impressions of people in their host countries. Did their perspective change over time?
- If your class is writing to a Peace Corps Volunteer, try to find out how experience in the host country changed his or her initial impressions.
- Ask the newest students in the class to share their first impressions of your school and the class. Have your class then brainstorm ideas to help new students have a positive beginning in your school. If there is a need to assist new students in their adjustment, this could be developed into a service-learning project. See the Introduction to *Looking at Ourselves and Others* for a Service-Learning Rubric.

## First Impressions

<b>What I Think My Partner Likes</b>	<b>Evidence to Support What I Think</b>	<b>What My Partner Said About My Observation</b>



## The Blind Men and the Elephant<sup>25</sup>



**Class time needed:** 20 minutes



### **Materials**

One copy of “The Blind Men and the Elephant”

### **Objectives**

- Students will develop sensitivity to others’ points of view.
- Students will understand the importance of having as much information as possible before coming to conclusions.

This retelling of a traditional story from India illustrates how different people can have distinctly different perceptions of the same thing. Students will readily see the faulty thinking behind the blind men’s arguments, but they may need some help understanding that even when presented with a real elephant, each man could “see” only what he already believed to be true. Use this story to encourage your students to develop perspective awareness—awareness that each of us creates a unique view of the world based on personal experience, language, and culture.

### **Procedure**

Since “The Blind Men and the Elephant” is a folktale from oral tradition, you may want to rehearse the story several times and tell it rather than read it to your class. Before you present the story, ask students to give their interpretations of the word “see.” Reinforce the idea that to see can mean to perceive something visually or to understand an idea. Ask students to listen to the story for examples of both definitions.

### **Debriefing**

After students have heard the story, use the following questions to guide discussion of how differences in perspective can make it difficult for people to communicate. Students should be encouraged to apply the moral of the folktale to real-life situations.

1. How does it feel when another person doesn’t “see” something the same way you do?
2. What happens in the story when each blind man “sees” the elephant? Why were there six different ideas about the elephant? Were any of the men right about the elephant? Were any of them completely wrong?
3. What did the blind men learn from the Rajah? What does the storyteller want us to learn from this tale?
4. Do problems like this happen in real life? Think of times when arguments or misunderstandings have occurred because people see situations from different points of view. Describe what happened.
5. What if the men in this story were not blind? Would they still have different ideas about elephants?
6. Does the story give you any ideas about how these problems can be solved? What are some steps you can take to understand why another person doesn’t see things the way you do?

**Extending the Ideas**

- Ask students to write an extension of the story that includes the conversation the six men might have had as they journeyed home.
- Have students write original stories that illustrate the importance of perspective-awareness.
- Ask students to write and perform a skit based on the story. The skit could be performed for other classes, and the performers could guide a debriefing with their audience.
- Have students work in groups of six to create group illustrations of the story. Alternatively, have them use recycled materials to create a sculpture of the elephant combining the perspectives of the six blind men.
- Encourage students to talk about misunderstandings they experience or observe that seem to be the result of clashes between points of view. Work with students to role-play behavior that resolves the misunderstanding.
- If your class is corresponding with a Peace Corps Volunteer, ask him or her to provide some examples of differences in how people in the host country view the world and the way Americans “see” things. What has the Volunteer learned from these differences?



## The Blind Men and the Elephant

Long ago six old men lived in a village in India. Each was born blind. The other villagers loved the old men and kept them away from harm. Since the blind men could not see the world for themselves, they had to imagine many of its wonders. They listened carefully to the stories told by travelers to learn what they could about life outside the village.

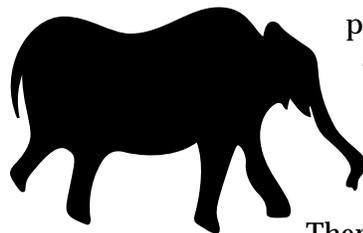
The men were curious about many of the stories they heard, but they were most curious about elephants. They were told that elephants could trample forests, carry huge burdens, and frighten young and old with their loud trumpet calls. But they also knew that the Rajah's daughter rode an elephant when she traveled in her father's kingdom. Would the Rajah let his daughter get near such a dangerous creature?

The old men argued day and night about elephants. "An elephant must be a powerful giant," claimed the first blind man. He had heard stories about elephants being used to clear forests and build roads.

"No, you must be wrong," argued the second blind man. "An elephant must be graceful and gentle if a princess is to ride on its back."

"You're wrong! I have heard that an elephant can pierce a man's heart with its terrible horn," said the third blind man.

"Please," said the fourth blind man. "You are all mistaken. An elephant is nothing more than a large sort of cow. You know how people exaggerate."



"I am sure that an elephant is something magical," said the fifth blind man. "That would explain why the Rajah's daughter can travel safely throughout the kingdom."

"I don't believe elephants exist at all," declared the sixth blind man. "I think we are the victims of a cruel joke."

Finally, the villagers grew tired of all the arguments, and they arranged for the curious men to visit the palace of the Rajah to learn the truth about elephants. A young boy from their village was selected to guide the blind men on their journey. The smallest man put his hand on the boy's shoulder. The second blind man put his hand on his friend's shoulder, and so on until all six men were ready to walk safely behind the boy who would lead them to the Rajah's magnificent palace.

When the blind men reached the palace, they were greeted by an old friend from their village who worked as a gardener on the palace grounds. Their friend led them to the courtyard.

There stood an elephant. The blind men stepped forward to touch the creature that was the subject of so many arguments.

The first blind man reached out and touched the side of the huge animal. "An elephant is smooth and solid like a wall!" he declared. "It must be very powerful."

The second blind man put his hand on the elephant's limber trunk. "An elephant is like a giant snake," he announced.

The third blind man felt the elephant's pointed tusk. "I was right," he decided. "This creature is as sharp and deadly as a spear."



The fourth blind man touched one of the elephant's four legs. "What we have here," he said, "is an extremely large cow."

The fifth blind man felt the elephant's giant ear. "I believe an elephant is like a huge fan or maybe a magic carpet that can fly over mountains and treetops," he said.

The sixth blind man gave a tug on the elephant's fuzzy tail. "Why, this is nothing more than a piece of old rope. Dangerous, indeed," he scoffed.

The gardener led his friends to the shade of a tree. "Sit here and rest for the long journey home," he said. "I will bring you some water to drink."

While they waited, the six blind men talked about the elephant.

"An elephant is like a wall," said the first blind man. "Surely we can finally agree on that."

"A wall? An elephant is a giant snake!" answered the second blind man.

"It's a spear, I tell you," insisted the third blind man.

"I'm certain it's a giant cow," said the fourth blind man.

"Magic carpet. There's no doubt," said the fifth blind man.

"Don't you see?" pleaded the sixth blind man. "Someone used a rope to trick us."

Their argument continued and their shouts grew louder and louder.

"Wall!" "Snake!" "Spear!" "Cow!"  
"Carpet!" "Rope!"

"STOP SHOUTING!" called a very angry voice.

It was the Rajah, awakened from his nap by the noisy argument.

"How can each of you be so certain you are right?" asked the ruler.

The six blind men considered the question. And then, knowing the Rajah to be a very wise man, they decided to say nothing at all.

"The elephant is a very large animal," said the Rajah kindly. "Each man touched only one part. Perhaps if you put the parts together, you will see the truth. Now, let me finish my nap in peace."

When their friend returned to the garden with the cool water, the six men rested quietly in the shade, thinking about the Rajah's advice.

"He is right," said the first blind man. "To learn the truth, we must put all the parts together. Let's discuss this on the journey home."

The first blind man put his hand on the shoulder of the young boy who would guide them home. The second blind man put a hand on his friend's shoulder, and so on until all six men were ready to travel together.

*Retold by Donelle Blubaugh*



# Opposites



**Class time needed:** 30 minutes

## **Materials**

Pencils and paper

## **Objectives**

- Students will recognize that their classmates hold a variety of opinions.
- Students will identify factors that influence perspective and opinion.

## **Introduction**

This activity is designed to illustrate the variety of perspectives and opinions represented in the class. It will help students understand that perceptions are influenced by personal experience and taste as well as cultural background. This is a good opportunity to help students get to know each other better by recognizing the variety of cultures and talents represented in their community.

## **Procedure**

Tell your students that you would like them to explore their opinions about a topic of current interest.

1. Ask the students to choose a category such as school, music, food, television, or a theme currently being discussed in a curricular area.
2. Present the students with a list of opposites describing a variety of opinions and perspectives such as rich/poor, beautiful/ugly, easy/difficult, delicious/disgusting, boring/interesting.
3. Ask each student to write down the name of an activity, a thing, or an idea (not a person!) that represents each concept. Encourage students to respond according to their honest feelings, not according to what is cool or funny.
4. Once students have completed their individual lists, have students share some of their responses. As a group, look at the variety of perceptions represented by the students' lists.

## **Debriefing**

Use the following questions to help students reflect on the ways we form opinions.

1. How do you feel when someone disagrees with your opinion about something?
2. How many different examples of things that are delicious did we collect? Is there any one thing that we could all agree is delicious?
3. Why do you think there are so many differences of opinion about these ideas? What did you learn about our class when we compared our opinions?
4. What might happen if we asked every student in our school to do this activity? What would our community be like if everyone had the same preferences and opinions?
5. What are some ways differences can be used to make a community work better?

### Extending the Ideas

- Use this activity as a starting point for building a class service directory similar to those found in community newspapers and telephone books. Students can work together to develop a questionnaire that probes individual student interests and talents. Then have students design advertising pages for each other based on responses to the questionnaire. (For example: “Need help with math? Contact Tonya Johnson, our class expert.” “Ron Nguyen is a terrific artist! Let him know if you’re a writer with a story to illustrate.” “Maria Rodriguez has an amazing collection of baseball cards. Call her when you’re ready to trade.”) Be sure to help those students who may have trouble identifying special skills or interests and encourage students with complementary talents to develop group advertisements.
- Invite a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer or someone from your community who has spent time in other countries to talk to your class about how perceptions of rich/poor, beautiful/ugly, delicious/disgusting, etc. vary from culture to culture. Contact World Wise Schools for a list of Returned Volunteers in your area (e-mail: <[dpinfo@peacecorps.gov](mailto:dpinfo@peacecorps.gov)>; phone: 800-424-8580).
- If you are corresponding with a current Peace Corps Volunteer, ask for comments on how his or her perspective on concepts such as good/bad, rich/poor, or easy/difficult has changed in the host country.



## Activity Suggestions: Grades 3-5

## Stereotype Busters

**Class Time Needed:** 20 minutes

### Materials

- A cassette tape or CD player and recorded music
- 4 small containers
- Pieces of paper, each printed with a stereotype (Examples: All redheads have short tempers, all nurses are women, all tall people like basketball, only men like sports cars, all doctors are rich)

*Note:* Be careful not to use racial or other stereotypes that might offend participants.

### Objective

- Students will learn appropriate ways to address stereotyping.

### Introduction

Each of us hears or makes stereotypical comments every day. Students need to become aware of the damaging effects of generalizations and stereotypes. They also need to develop tools for addressing stereotypes when they hear them and checking their own thinking when they find themselves using stereotypes to make judgments. This activity gives students an opportunity to practice ways to reduce stereotyping.

### Procedure

1. Have the students arrange their chairs in a large circle.
2. Review the concepts of stereotypes and prejudice and come to an agreement about definitions. In this context, a stereotype is an oversimplified statement based on a single characteristic. For example, the statement “All men hate to cook” expresses a stereotype. Prejudice is to *pre*-judge or to form an opinion (usually negative) about someone or something before all the facts are known. “Richard can’t cook—he’s a guy!” is an example of prejudice.
3. Discuss why stereotypes and prejudice are harmful. For example, they are often based on faulty information, they get in the way of knowing people as individuals, and they can lead to serious misunderstandings.
4. Tell students that even though it is easy to fall into the habit of using stereotypes to prejudge people, there are ways to reduce stereotypes and combat prejudice. One way is to check our own thinking, to be careful of jumping to conclusions based on generalizations or others’ opinions. Another way is to politely challenge stereotypes when we hear them by offering evidence that the stereotype is false.
5. Model some statements that “bust” the men-hate-to-cook-stereotype, for example:
  - I don’t like to stereotype, so I can’t agree with you. My brother makes the best bread I’ve ever tasted.
  - I don’t like to stereotype, so I can’t agree with you. I’m sure there are many men who like to cook.



6. Explain that the students will participate in a game that will help them become “Stereotype Busters.” Participants will pass a container around the circle when the music begins. When the music stops, the student who is holding the container will read the stereotype it holds. Then, the student to his or her right will respond, using statements similar to those modeled earlier. Encourage other students in the circle to offer additional suggestions.

7. Repeat the activity with the remaining containers.

## Debriefing

Use the following questions to help students think about how and when to challenge stereotypes in real life situations. **Note: During the debriefing, be sure to discuss when it is and is not appropriate to challenge statements made by other people.**

1. How did it feel to speak up about stereotypes?
2. What happened when it was your turn to respond? Was it easy or difficult to “bust” the stereotype?
3. What are some other stereotypes? How do you think these are learned? What are some ways to respond to stereotypes?
4. It has been said that a stereotypical statement tells more about the person who says it than about the people who are being stereotyped. What does this mean? Do you agree or disagree?
5. Do you think you could really use “Stereotype Busters” to check your own thinking? Would you feel comfortable doing this with a family member? A friend?
6. What if you heard an older person make a stereotypical statement? (Caution students that it is best to know people before challenging their statements. We can’t predict a stranger’s response. The best response is to do a mental check to make sure we are not influenced by someone else’s prejudices.)
7. What advice would you give to a friend who is the object of stereotyping and prejudice?



## Extending the Ideas

- If stereotypes (oversimplified images of people, issues, or events) lead to prejudice (judgments based on stereotypical images), then prejudice leads to discrimination—treating someone unfairly because we believe their differences make them inferior. Discuss this continuum with your students, using news stories or fictional stories that deal with discrimination issues as examples. Have students look for stories related to discrimination in magazines and newspapers and on television broadcasts over a period of several days. Have students identify the stereotypes that lie behind these stories. What assumptions (prejudgments) were made about the people who experienced discrimination?
- If your class is corresponding with a Peace Corps Volunteer through World Wise Schools, ask the Volunteer questions like these.
  - Did you have any preconceived ideas about your host country before going there? How were these prejudgements changed during your volunteer service?
  - Do the people in your host country have preconceived ideas about Americans? How do you correct these ideas?
  - Are there other stereotypes in your host country similar to the ones in the United States?
- People often develop oversimplified ideas about the homeless. A study of the causes of homelessness and the services available for the homeless in your community might lead your class to a service-learning project. After studying the problem, and learning about the issues, students could develop a plan to help meet community needs. Use the Service-Learning Rubric in the introduction to this guide to help plan a project with strong impact.

## People Tags<sup>29</sup>

**Class Time Needed:** 30 minutes

### **Materials**

One copy of “People Tags” for every four students

### **Objectives**

- Students will understand how labels, even those that seem neutral, can influence our thinking about people.
- Students will recognize the importance of getting to know a person before making judgments.

### **Introduction**

Labels are a convenient, and necessary, way of organizing information about people and events. But labels often become substitutes for thought and experience. Even when labels are accurate and neutral, they describe only one aspect of a person. When they are used as the sole source of information, they limit our understanding and cut us off from full communication. “People Tags” is an activity that illustrates how misleading labels can be when they are applied to people.

### **Procedure**

1. Prepare for the lesson by making one copy of “People Tags” for every four students. Cut off the fact cards and keep them for the second part of the activity.
2. Divide students into groups of four. Give each group a set of people cards (Uncle Fred, Aunt Jennifer, etc.) and object cards (dictionary, clock, etc.). Do not give out the fact cards yet.
3. Assign the task: You are doing your holiday shopping for Uncle Fred, who rides in a motorcycle gang; Aunt Jennifer, a librarian; Cousin George, a Navy recruit; and Great-Aunt Phyllis, a senior citizen. From the collection in front of you, which gifts would you choose for each?
4. After a few minutes, discuss the following.
  - Who gave Uncle Fred the leather jacket? Aunt Jennifer the coffee mug? Cousin George the tattoo? Great-Aunt Phyllis the rocking chair?
  - How did you decide who would get each gift?
  - How did the labels (i.e., “senior citizen,” “librarian”) influence your decisions?
5. Pass out the fact cards and comment that perhaps the students need more information before making their final gift choices.
6. Give students time to “reassign” gifts.

### **Debriefing**

Use the following questions to guide discussion about getting to know people before making judgments.

1. How did it feel to try to choose gifts for people based on a single piece of information or label?
2. What happened when you were given more information? Who changed their gift ideas? Why?
3. What is the purpose of this activity? Can you give some examples of ways labels influence the way you think about people or things?

4. What are some problems that can occur when we rely too much on labels?
5. What if you were asked to choose gifts for a member of this class whom you don't know well? What could you do that would help you choose the right gift?
6. How can we apply this activity to learning about other cultures?

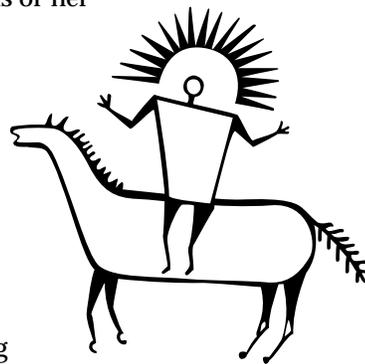
### Extending the Ideas

- Have students create posters to illustrate the many dimensions behind the labels with which they are most familiar—their names. Ask each student to create a list of words and phrases to correspond with letters in his or her name. Explain that the words should describe what people will learn about them when they look behind their “label” and get to know them well. Students should feel free to brag a little, as well as to describe things they may like to improve. Their names should be the center points in the designs. The teacher can use the example below or demonstrate the activity using his or her own name to get students started.

liKes baseball  
 Artistic  
 Reliable  
 Energetic  
 forgEtful  
 hates Mondays

- Have students work with a partner to find out more about each other. Give them time to talk about their interests, families, hobbies, and aspirations. Urge them to look for more than the obvious details. Then have each student create a poster about his or her partner. The posters should depict the person's personality and other attributes. The posters should be used to introduce the “real” person to the rest of the class in a validation activity. Afterwards, these should be displayed around the classroom or school.

- If you are corresponding with a Peace Corps Volunteer through World Wise Schools, send him or her smaller versions of the posters mentioned above. Be sure to use lightweight paper. If the Volunteer is a teacher or working with youth, ask him or her to consider completing this same activity and sending mini posters to your class in return.



## People Tags

Uncle Fred  (member of a motorcycle gang)	Aunt Jennifer  (librarian)	Cousin George  (Navy recruit)	Great Aunt Phyllis  (senior citizen)
			
			 Theater Tickets

FACT  Aunt Jennifer likes modern fashions. The leather look is "in."	FACT  Uncle George is looking forward to a career in the theater after his Navy tour.	FACT  Uncle Fred loves antique furniture.	FACT  Great-Aunt Phyllis has always been rebellious and daring.
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