

LESSON PLANNING ARTICLE

"Bursting" Stereotypes

Subjects

Arts & Humanities

- Language Arts

Social Studies

- Psychology
- Regions/Cultures
- Sociology

Grades

- 3-5
- 6-8
- 9-12



Return to [Teaching @ Tolerance](#) Lesson Article

Brief Description

Balloons serve as a conduit in this lesson in which students "burst" stereotypes that unfairly label individuals or groups.

Objectives

Students will

- learn the meaning of the word *stereotype*.
- work in groups to come up with stereotype statements.
- discuss whether the statements are fair.
- write what they learned from the activity.

Keywords

stereotype, tolerance, fairness, violence, culture, cultural, prejudice, understanding, racism, race, judgment, Asian, Mexican, Hispanic, Native Americans, multicultural, homophobia, homosexual, assumption, assume, generalize, opinion, self-esteem

Materials Needed

- 2-dozen multi-colored balloons, inflated
- 2-dozen paper or tag board sentence strips, 2-inches wide by 12-inches long
- thumbtacks (optional)
- crayons or markers
- common pin

Lesson Plan

Before the lesson.

Before starting this lesson, cut paper for sentence strips (paper or tag board cut to lengths approximately 2 inches wide and 12 inches long), and inflate about two dozen small balloons. Store balloons in a plastic trash bag in a closet.

Alternative: Cover a classroom bulletin board with white paper. Spread colorful balloons over the bulletin board; use thumbtacks to attach each balloon. This bulletin board is sure to arouse students' curiosity if you leave it up for a couple days prior to the activity.

Introduce the lesson.

To begin the lesson, write the words *man* and *woman* side-by-side at the top of the chalkboard or on a piece of chart paper. Draw a vertical line between the two words to create a two-column chart. Have students set up a piece of writing paper in the same way. Then ask students to write words or phrases that describe the qualities or characteristics of a man under the word *man* and words or phrases that describe a woman under the word *woman*. To get the ball rolling, you might ask students to share a few ideas with their classmates. Following are some typical students responses:

Man -- active, sports-lover, short hair, hard working, truck driver, breadwinner, strong...

Woman -- loving, nurse, shop, likes flowers, cries easily, long hair...

Give students a few minutes to compile their lists.

Next, arrange students into small groups and ask them to share their lists with group members. Then give each group two minutes to brainstorm additional words or phrases describing a man, and two minutes to brainstorm additional words or phrases describing a woman.

Bring the groups together to create a class list of words and phrases about men and women. Write them on the chalkboard as students share them. Then ask some of the following questions:

- Are you happy with the lists you have created? Do you see any changes you would like to make to them?
- Are there terms that do not belong under the heading they're under? Are there terms that might fit under both headings?
- Is it fair to say that *all* men _____ or that *all* women _____?

What is a *stereotype*?

Write the word *stereotype* on the chalkboard or chart. Ask students if they know what the word means. Write down the dictionary definition of the word. For example, *Scholastic Children's Dictionary* defines the term this way:

noun: An overly simple picture or opinion of a person, group, or thing. *It is a stereotype to say all old people are forgetful.*

Expand the lesson. Write on the chalkboard or chart the following phrases:

All old people are forgetful.
Men are better at math than women are.
African-American men are the best basketball players.

Give students a few moments to consider those phrases. Then ask them to share their reactions. Lead students to the conclusion that the statements are too general to be true; encourage them to recognize that it is unfair to make such sweeping statements. Help students make the connection between the phrases and the term *stereotype*.

Have students return to their small brainstorming groups and ask them to come up with additional stereotypes they might have heard or thought about.

Tell them keep a written record of the stereotypes they think of. When the flow of stereotype statements seems to be slowing down, ask students in each group to take a final look at their lists and mark with an asterisk 6-10 of the most interesting stereotypes. Bring the class back together so they can share their ideas. Each time a student shares a stereotype, hand that student a sentence strip so s/he can write the stereotype on a sentence strip. Instruct students to write large and bold; markers or crayons work best.

Some stereotypes that students might have thought of include:

- Kids who are into computers are geeky.
- Young kids are noisy.
- People who wear glasses are smart.
- Poor people are lazy.
- Women are better cooks than men.
- Girls are not as athletic as boys.
- All politicians are crooks.
- Everyone believes in God.
- Indians live on reservations.
- All doctors are rich.
- All Americans like to watch baseball.
- All tall people are good basketball players.

Bursting Stereotypes

Now it's time to grab from the closet the bag of inflated balloons (see **Before the lesson**) or to stand near the bulletin board you have prepared.

- If you have created a bulletin board for this activity, ask students to read each sentence strip aloud and staple it next to a balloon on the bulletin board. When all sentence strips are stapled to the board, lead a class discussion about each stereotype. [Have a common pin concealed in your hand for the next part of the activity.] Ask students if the stereotype statements are fair statements. When you are satisfied that students have refuted the stereotype, swipe the balloon with the common pin. *Pop!* -- that stereotype has been burst.
- If you choose not to create the bulletin board, call students holding sentence strips to come one at a time to the front of the classroom. Have each student read aloud the statement on his or her strip and hold the strip up for classmates to see. Hold up a balloon as the strip holder calls on classmates to refute the stereotype on the strip. Once satisfied that the stereotype has been blasted, *pop* the balloon.

Winding up the lesson.

Ask students to share how they felt about the lesson. What did they learn? Were there times during the lesson when they felt angry or sad?

Additional resources.

You might want to take a look at a couple other lessons about stereotypes that we found on the Internet. The lessons provide an interesting angle or two that can be incorporated into this lesson:

- [Stereotype Busters](#) (Grades 3-8)
- [Understanding Stereotypes](#) (Grades 7-12)

Assessment

Students will write a paragraph or two explaining what they learned from the activity. They should include specific examples of stereotypes and explain why they believe those stereotypes are wrong.

Lesson Plan Source

Education World

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