

SCAPEGOATING: An Activity for Middle School Children

Rationale:

The purpose of this activity is to examine how stereotyping, prejudice and discriminatory practices can lead to unfairly blaming individuals and groups for events when, in reality, the cause or causes are unclear or when the blame actually belongs elsewhere. This lesson also provides students with an introduction to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Understanding the Difference Between Stereotyping, Prejudice, Discrimination and Scapegoating

Directions:

1. Write the sentences below on a piece of chart paper, an overhead transparency or the chalkboard. Have students identify each statement as an example of stereotyping, prejudice or discrimination.

- Third graders are all babies. (stereotype)
- We don't like the third graders. (prejudice)
- Let's not let the third graders play with us. (discrimination)

2. Review the definitions of the terms stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination with the class and then have students develop examples similar to the ones in Procedure #1. The definitions are as follows:

- a. A stereotype is an oversimplified generalization about an entire group of people without regard for individual differences.
- b. Prejudice is pre-judging, making a decision about a person or group of people without sufficient knowledge. Prejudicial thinking is based on stereotypes. Prejudice is an attitude.
- c. Discrimination is the behavior that can follow prejudicial thinking. Discrimination is the denial of justice and fair treatment in many arenas, including employment, housing and political rights.

When it is clear that students understand how the terms differ, show them the statements below and again have them identify each as an example of stereotyping, prejudice or discrimination:

- All teenagers shoplift. (stereotyping)
- I don't like teenagers. (prejudice)
- Teenagers aren't allowed in my store. (discrimination)

3. After students have correctly identified each of the statements, add a fourth statement as follows:

- Teenagers are the reason why prices are so high.

4. Ask students to consider the following questions about the statement, using the following questions:

- What is the underlying assumption in this statement? (e.g., teenagers are to blame for high prices.)
- How would you know if this information is accurate?

- What are some other possible reasons why prices might be high? (e.g., storekeepers want to make a profit.)

- Do you think it is fair to blame teenagers for high prices without more factual information? Explain your thinking.

- How might stereotyping lead to blaming?

Write the word "scapegoating" on the chalkboard or on chart paper. Explain that scapegoating is when people unfairly blame a person or a group of people for something when in fact the blame lies elsewhere or when it is uncertain where the blame lies. Saying that teenagers are to blame for high prices is an example of scapegoating.

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Adapted from A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute Anti-Bias Study Guide (Elementary/Intermediate Level) New York: Anti-Defamation League, 2000.