

Chatter¹⁴

Class time needed: 40 minutes

Materials

- Photocopy of the “Chatter” etiquette sheets
- A whistle and a timer to help you pace the game

Objectives

- Students will experience the challenge of using and interpreting unfamiliar communication patterns.
- Students will identify strategies for successful cross-cultural communication.

Introduction

Language is one of the most obvious and one of the most complicated defining features of a culture. And language—vocabulary, syntax, intonation—is but one aspect of the complex communication patterns that groups use to share meaning and experience. Kristyn Leftridge¹⁵ served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Morocco from 1991 to 1992. In the example to the right from the Peace Corps’ collection of “Hello Data,” she describes the difficulty of a simple greeting.

“Chatter” is a simulation game that asks players to pay attention to the subtleties of communication and to discuss how these influence our perceptions of individuals and groups.

Procedure

1. Cut the photocopied etiquette sheets into strips and distribute as wide a variety of individual strips as possible.
2. Move the classroom furniture to the sides of the room so that the players have plenty of room to move around.
3. Help the students organize themselves into groups of four to six members. Select another group of three to four students to act as observers.
4. Shuffle the etiquette sheets, and give one to each student. Ask the students to keep their sheets hidden from each other and to study them carefully.
5. Explain that they will be attending a party with guests from many different cultures. The etiquette sheets define the roles that students will play as they make small talk at the party. The observers will look for behaviors indicating frustration or special efforts participants make to understand the “rules” of communication.

In Moroccan Arabic the standard basic greeting is “Salam oo-alley koom.” It translates literally to “Peace be unto you.” The appropriate response is “Oo-alley koom salam,” meaning “And unto you peace.” But knowing the words is not enough. Greetings in Morocco will go on for many minutes—sometimes up to half an hour—as the parties ask about each other’s health, faith in Allah, families, work, etc. Moroccans will shake hands when greeting, touching the heart immediately after the handshake to show that the greeting is sincere. Sometimes instead of touching the heart, they will kiss their own hand after the handshake as a sign of particular esteem or affection. In the case of family or close friends, women greeting women and men greeting men will kiss each other’s cheeks back and forth a few times. In the north, it’s right cheek—left cheek—left cheek. In other parts of the country, it could be right—left—right, or right—left only. How much you kiss cheeks also depends on how much you like the person, or how long it’s been since you’ve seen them. The longer it’s been, the more kisses are exchanged. Women and men who are not related NEVER kiss.¹⁶

6. Ask the members of each small group to talk with each other using the conversational rules described on their etiquette sheets. Students should not divulge the contents of their sheets. The teacher and the student observers should watch the groups as they converse, looking for behaviors to discuss during the debriefing.

7. Blow a whistle after seven to 10 minutes and ask the students to form themselves into new groups.

8. These groups should start a new conversation, with the students continuing to follow the instructions on their etiquette sheets. Again, the teacher and observers should watch the groups as they converse, looking for changes that might occur between the two sessions.



9. Blow the whistle again after another seven to 10 minutes and ask the students to stop talking.

10. Tell them that there are 12 different etiquette sheets and that it is possible for more than one person in each group to have the same sheet. Ask the students to think back silently about their conversations and to guess what instructions each player had on his or her sheet. After a brief pause, ask the participants to take turns telling their guesses to the rest of the groups. However, no student should confirm or deny anyone's guesses at this time.

11. Tell the participants that some etiquette sheets said, "Be yourself." Ask the students to try to guess if any member of the group was acting as himself or herself.

12. Ask the students to tell one another what their etiquette sheet said. Were the students' guesses accurate?

Debriefing

Use questions such as the following to guide discussion about the challenges of cross-cultural communication. Be sure to ask the student observers to share their observations of group and individual behavior to help give participants a broader view of the activity.

1. How did you feel about this exercise? Were you relieved or disappointed when it came to an end? Why?
2. What happened during the simulation? Did any of you feel embarrassed or frustrated during the conversations? What made you feel that way? Was it the way your etiquette sheet asked you to behave? Or the way someone else was instructed to behave? Why do you think you reacted the way you did?
3. Did you consider any of the behavior patterns in this exercise rude or offensive? If so, was it one of your behaviors or someone else's? Why did this behavior bother you?
4. What were the differences between your conversations in the first group and in the second group? Why do you think these differences occurred? Does this happen in real-life situations?
5. Did you correctly guess the etiquette-sheet behaviors at the conclusion of the activity?
6. Discuss the following statements. Ask students whether they agree or disagree with each statement. Ask them to use examples of their experiences from the game and from real life to support their opinions.
 - There is more to a conversation than just the words and sentences.
 - We tend to judge other people based on what we think is "normal."

- Behaviors that we consider to be bizarre or rude may be acceptable or polite in other cultures.
- Sometimes you may feel negative about another person because his or her conversational style seems strange.
- After time, people get used to unusual behaviors and begin paying more attention to the topic of the conversation.

7. What real-world situations are represented in this game? What do the etiquette sheets represent?
8. Can you think of any conversational behaviors you exhibit that others might find distracting or strange? (Hint: Do teenagers have ways of communicating that adults don't understand?)
9. What might have happened if the conversations had lasted for 45 minutes instead of 10?
10. What would have happened if you had been asked to solve a homework problem with the other members of your group?
11. What advice would you give a friend who is about to participate in this activity for the first time?
12. What if you were to visit a foreign country? Based on your experiences during this activity, what are some things you could do to make communication easier?

Extending the Ideas

- Use World Wide Web resources to help students communicate with people from around the world. Use a search engine to locate information. Have students begin their searches with broad terms like “culture” or “language” and refine the search to meet their specific interests as they browse.
- The World Wise Schools program web site <<http://www.peacecorps.gov>> offers resources for teaching and learning about various countries and cultures. Use the suggestions found in “Volunteer Views” for use of the “Hello Data.”
 - Find other countries where a greeting is accompanied by gestures or has a specific traditional format. Give your ideas about what these greetings indicate about the culture of the people. Prepare an oral presentation for your classmates detailing your findings and including a demonstration of the greetings you have discovered.
 - List the ways in which people greet each other in the United States, adult to adult, adult to child, and teenager to teenager. Be sure to include any regional and/or ethnic variations. Explain any accompanying gestures or mannerisms. Prepare a role-play that shows how you would teach a visiting foreign student how to say hello to different groups of adults and young people in the United States.
- View one or more World Wise School *Destination* video tapes. As students watch the tape, they should note customs, objects, and ideas that are unique to the cultures depicted. After viewing the tape, ask students to react to what they have seen. For example, would students feel comfortable shopping in a crowded outdoor marketplace? What adjustments would American families have to make in order to live in a yurt as many families in Kyrgyzstan do? Then work with the whole class to categorize their notes according to “Features of Culture,” found in the introduction to this section. Have students discuss whether these universals help them view cultural differences more objectively.

"Chatter" Etiquette Sheets

It is impolite to shout, so talk softly. Whisper. Even if people cannot hear you, do not raise your voice.



It is impolite to talk to more than one person at the same time. Always talk to a single person standing near you so that you can have a private conversation. Do not address your remarks to the group as a whole.



It is important to get others' attention before you speak, so hold your hand above your head and snap your fingers before you make a statement or ask a question. That's the polite way to get everyone's attention.



It is impolite to crowd people, so maintain your distance. Stand away so that there is at least an arm's length between you and the nearest person. If anyone gets too close to you, back off until you have achieved the required distance.



It is friendly to share your thoughts and feelings without any inhibition, so make several self-disclosure statements. Describe your intimate feelings about different subjects. Ask personal questions of the other members of the group.



It is impolite to stare at people, so avoid eye contact. Look at the floor or the speaker's shoes. Do not look at the speaker's face.



It is polite and reassuring to reach out and touch someone. Touch people on the arm or the shoulder when you speak to them.



It is important to show your enthusiasm, so jump in before other speakers have finished their sentences and add your ideas. Remember, it is rude to hold back your thoughts.



It is impolite to speak impulsively. Whenever somebody asks you a question, silently count to seven before you give an answer.



It is impolite to be aloof from others. Stand close to others until you nearly touch them. If someone backs off, keep moving closer.



Be yourself! Behave as you would normally behave at an informal party.



Where I Come From

Class time needed: 20 minutes for initial steps and then two to three additional classes for research and presentation

Materials

Paper and pencils

Objective

- Students will examine their own family traditions to identify how beliefs, values, and customs vary from culture to culture and how those traditions influence their perception of other groups.

Note: This activity asks students to share potentially sensitive aspects of their personal lives. Help students find “safe” ways to participate and set clear expectations for mutual respect in the class. Teachers should be sensitive to the needs of all students. Reassure students who live with single parents, grandparents, other relatives, or foster families that their experiences are valid and valuable contributions to this activity.

Introduction

One aspect of cultural identity is the unique set of traditions held in common by a group of people. We can observe evidence of these traditions in day-to-day activities as well as in the ways groups celebrate special occasions. Introduce or review this concept with students and help them generate concrete examples of traditions commonly associated with special events in the United States (fireworks on Independence Day, feasts on Thanksgiving, valentines on February 14, etc.).



Then introduce the idea that families are unique cultural groups. While a specific family will share many traits common to larger groups (religious beliefs, clothing styles, language, etc.), each family develops its own set of traditions that sets it apart from other families. These traditional activities become so firmly a part of “the way we do things” that we sometimes feel puzzled or out of place when these activities are not present in other families.

Procedure

1. Ask each student to write a list of special events that are observed by his or her family. Events can include annual holiday or religious observances as well as family milestones, such as birthdays and anniversaries. Some families have special traditions for observing annual events, such as the first day of the harvest season, or for celebrating special accomplishments, such as graduating to a new grade level.
2. For each item on the list, students should complete this sentence: On this day my family always _____.
3. Ask each student to share one or two sentences with the rest of the class. Be sure students understand that they need not share information that is considered private or sacred. Discourage students from making judgmental comments about others' lists.
4. Finally, ask the class to comment on the variety of events celebrated by the families represented in the room. Do some students celebrate special events in similar ways? What do their lists show about what the students and their families value? Which family traditions are truly unique and which are connected to community, ethnic, or religious traditions observed by larger cultural groups?

5. For homework, ask each student to choose one family tradition to explore more fully through interviews and library research. Students can compile this information into oral or written reports for the class. Work with students to formulate a set of interview questions that will encourage family members or acquaintances to discuss their traditions with students. Possible questions include:

- When did this tradition begin?
- Is this tradition associated with special food, clothing, decorations, music?
- Who participates in this event? Do individuals have specific roles or responsibilities?
- Has this tradition changed over the years? What led to these changes?
- Is this tradition associated with a particular season, climate or location? Would it be the same at another time or place?
- How do other family members feel about this tradition? Why do they think it is important?
- How would you feel if you were unable to participate in this event with your family?

Debriefing

Discuss with students how family or community traditions contribute to each individual's idea of what is "normal" and important. Help students extend this idea into their thinking about and accepting the traditions, values, and beliefs of other families and larger cultural groups.

Extending the Ideas

- If your class is corresponding with a Peace Corps Volunteer, have students explore how families in your Volunteer's host country celebrate special events.
- Volunteer Michelle Fisher¹⁷ commented on the importance of family gardens to the people she knew in Vilnius, Lithuania:

Most of the people here live in apartment buildings. Everyone has their own flat, or apartment, and typically they all have three rooms. Everyone has a garden, and they must have a garden because if they don't they're not going to eat in the winter. Most people have a pear tree, a plum tree, and an apple tree, strawberries—all kinds of vegetables and potatoes. Potatoes are the staple of the diet here. Kibelisks and cepilini are two traditional Lithuanian meals both made from potatoes. When it's time to harvest the apples, the people pick all the apples from the trees and all the apples from the ground and begin to make different things out them. Sometimes they make applesauce, apple cheese, apple cake, and they dry the apples. Just about a month ago every house I'd walk into had big strings of little cut apples strung throughout the house.

The gardens are usually 10 to 15 kilometers outside the town, and so in order to get to them the families must take a bus. The buses run once a day during the week, and so they have to spend the night. On the weekends they run two to three times a day. All the gardens are together, and they're all the same size. I'd say they're probably one-eighth to one-half acre.

A garden actually plays another role besides being a source of food. It keeps the family together because the children are needed to work there. So every weekend the children are taken there. Most people don't have cars, so they take the bus and stay over the weekend. Children stay with their parents and work. When they go to the garden, they usually go mushroom picking in the forests nearby. It's interesting because they usually break off—the sons tend to go with the father and the daughters all go with their mother. And so they have contests of who will get the most mushrooms. And it's a nice time because the parents are able to bond with their children. They work so much here that they don't have time to just sit and talk with their kids. When they're out in the forest, they tell the children what life was like, what life's going to be, what they need to get an education. And they just talk about family things. You know, they're able to bond.

- Ask your students if any of their family traditions revolve around working together. Compare their responses to Michelle Fisher's comments about Lithuanian families.
- Explore the World Wise Schools online resources <<http://www.peacecorps.gov>> to learn more about the traditions of the people who live in Peace Corps host countries.

Activity Suggestions: Grades 6-9

Is That a Fact?

Class time needed: 30 minutes

Materials

“Is That a Fact?” worksheets for each group of four to five students



Objectives

- Students will articulate the difference between fact and opinion.
- Students will identify ways to clarify or qualify statements of opinion.

Introduction

Understanding the difference between fact and opinion is critical to our ability to examine our reactions to events and people. Stereotypes and prejudices are often based on opinions that are perceived as facts. Skills practiced during this activity can be reinforced using content from textbooks, magazines, and newspapers, as well as from correspondence with your Peace Corps Volunteer if your class is participating in a World Wise Schools match program.

Procedure

1. Write three examples of facts on one side of the board and three examples of opinions on the other side of the board.

Examples of facts:

- George has blue eyes.
- This room has four windows.
- There are 50 states in the United States.

Examples of opinions:

- This room is too warm.
- Math class is boring.
- The best cars are made in the United States.

2. Ask students to identify the statements of fact and the statements of opinion. Label each group.
3. Have students work with partners to come up with definitions for the words “fact” and “opinion.” Choose a class definition, using a dictionary or a language arts textbook if necessary.
4. Divide the class into small groups of four to five students each. Provide each group with a copy of the worksheet “Is That A Fact?” Ask one student in each group to cut the sheet into strips as indicated. That student should “deal” the strips out to the group’s members until all of the strips have been distributed.
5. Have each small group divide its work space into three areas, one labeled “Facts,” another “Opinions,” and the third “Need More Information.” Have students work together to place the statements in the appropriate areas according to the definitions they agreed upon earlier.
6. As you monitor the group activity, ask representatives from each group to explain how the group is deciding to place the statements. Make sure their decisions followed the agreed upon definitions for fact and opinion.
7. Ask students to examine the statements in the “Need More Information” category. Have them work together to identify sources of information that would prove or disprove the statements.

Debriefing

When the small groups have completed their work, bring the whole class back together to discuss the process. Use the following questions to check student understanding of the difference between fact and opinion.

1. How can you tell whether something is a fact or an opinion?
2. What makes it difficult to decide if something is a fact or an opinion?
3. When you were working in small groups, did everyone agree on which statements were fact and which were opinion? Could any of the opinion statements be considered facts if we had more information or if the statement were more specific? (Example: When it comes to math scores, this is the best school in the whole town.)
4. If you're not sure whether something is a fact, what can you do?
5. Why is it important to know whether something is a fact or an opinion?



Extending the Ideas

- Have students rewrite the statements identified as opinions using qualifying phrases (e.g., I think, according to the book I read, etc.) or more specific language.
- Have students watch one or more of the World Wise Schools *Destination* video tapes. Ask students to listen for and record facts and opinions as they watch. Compare responses in small groups.
- Have your students read essays by Peace Corps Volunteers or other pieces of writing to find examples of facts and opinions. Check the World Wise Schools online resources for letters from Peace Corps Volunteers or use the excerpt, "Living in a Traditional African Way" from an interview with Volunteer Craig Benson. The entire interview can be found on the Peace Corps web site at <http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/dp/interview/wwsin2.html>.

Is That a Fact?



Girls are smarter than boys.

Americans love French fries.

Americans are friendly.

Men are usually taller than women.

The world is a better place now than it was 100 years ago.

There is more farm land in the United States than in any other country.

Today is a beautiful day.

Most people in Africa live in urban areas.

This is the best school in the whole town.

Women make better teachers than men.

Most people in Honduras are unhappy.

The U.S.A. is the richest country in the world.



Living in a Traditional African Way

The following reading is adapted from an interview conducted with Craig Benson during his Peace Corps service in Cameroon in Central Africa between 1990 and 1993.

The thing that's really important no matter where you go are the friends that you meet, the people that you love, and the people with whom you share life. I have some really great neighbors here. In particular, I have a family—five children, two parents—with whom I'm close. The wife is a leader of a farming group that I work with. She introduced me to her farming group, which has turned out to be one of the best. That family welcomed me in a very traditional African way.

When I first came to the house they brought me food for three months. I didn't cook. They brought me two meals a day. I got to try out all the different kinds of African foods. They would always invite me out for any occasion, invite me to come to the church, invite me to the farm, invite me to this baptism, invite me to go to this "cry-die," which is what they say for a funeral, or to this "born-house," which is a birth celebration when a woman has a baby.

They showed me the village and have watched out for me since I've been here. It's those kind of people that really, no matter how much the chips go down, make an experience like this worthwhile.

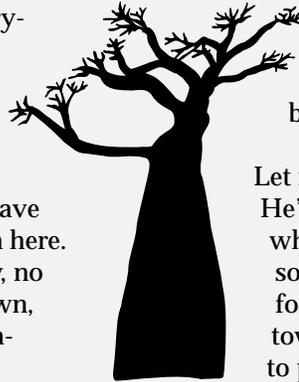
Let me tell you about one friend I have. He's a young man here in the village who hadn't been in school for some time. When I came, I asked for someone to help me around the house—not really so much for cleaning, but to show me where to get water and how to do things in the village. That young man, Dan, has become a good friend. We have a poultry project going on.

You couldn't buy eggs anywhere in Ande, so Dan and I put our heads together and said, "Well, we both like to eat eggs, so let's get some day-old chicks." And, sure enough,

now we have poultry and they're grown. They're giving us eggs. So I've just put Dan in complete control of that. I've taught him the ropes about what diseases poultry can get, what kind of feed to give them, how to get a lot of eggs, what kind of green feed, bone meal, sand, and ants they need. We're feeding them well and it's a nice demonstration. People come to see it and ask why our fowls are so big and theirs are so small. They ask why ours are alive and theirs are dead (because they've died in the dry season).

We're getting some revenue from it, which Dan is controlling. He collects eggs. My deal with him is, "You just give me the eggs I need to eat, and the rest is yours." He manages it—saves the money from it to buy more feed and then whatever is left over he uses. He's actually put himself back in school. He's been able to sponsor himself through school by taking care of some chickens.

Let me say one more thing about Dan. He's teaching me how to play football, which is very important! I'm a terrible soccer player—football is what they say for soccer. And it's the only game in town—it doesn't matter if I know how to play basketball, baseball, volleyball, and all the rest—you can't play them here. Football is it. So I said, "Dan, I'll help you with the fowls. I'll help you with anything, but you've got to teach me how to play football." So I'm getting better. It's been a year, but I'm only up to the level of high school-age players. I play with little kids, and that's about as good as I am. I'm not as good as people my same age, but I'm on my way!



How Accurate Is It? ²⁶

Class time needed: 40 minutes

Materials

- “How Accurate Is It” worksheets for every two students
- Pencils and paper

Objective

- Students will learn to identify and modify generalizations.

Introduction

This activity introduces students to the difficult concept of generalization so that they will challenge generalizations made about people, insist on knowing the evidence that supports these, and be willing to modify their own generalizations when confronted by evidence showing them to be false. It is important for students to understand that almost all generalizations, particularly those about people, need to be qualified. The activity also asks students to practice using qualifying language.

Procedure

1. Explain the meaning of “general” and “specific” using objects in the room or pictures to illustrate your point (e.g., “This horse is black” versus “All horses are black”).
2. Write the following statement on the board: “Snakes are harmful.” Ask students to write whether they agree or disagree with the statement at the top of a sheet of paper. Then read each of the following questions aloud. Have students write “yes” or “no” in response to each question.
 - Are all snakes harmful?
 - Are most snakes harmful?
 - Are many snakes harmful?
 - Are some snakes harmful?
 - Are a few snakes harmful?
 - Do you know about all snakes?
 - Is the statement “Snakes are harmful” true?
3. As a class, explore the following questions.
 - How many students agreed with the statement on the board? How many students answered no to the seventh question? What made you change your mind?
 - What words can you add to the statement “Snakes are harmful” to make it more accurate (e.g., some snakes, many snakes, a few snakes in Asia)?
 - What can you add to the statement to show that you don’t have a lot of factual information about snakes (e.g., as far as I know, I’m not sure, in my experience)?
4. Have students work in small groups to evaluate the accuracy of the generalizations listed on the “How Accurate Is It?” worksheet. Encourage them to discuss their reasoning and come to consensus on each statement. Then have students work in pairs to rewrite each statement using the qualifying phrases discussed above so that it is as accurate as possible.
5. As a class, discuss the conclusions of each group, paying close attention to how the statements were qualified.

Debriefing

Use the following questions to guide a brainstorming session to help students recognize generalizations and begin using qualifying language.

1. Have you ever heard anyone use a generalization to describe you or another person? How does it feel when someone does that?
2. What happened when we used a generalization to describe snakes? Was the statement accurate? What happened when we used qualifiers to describe snakes? When you filled out the worksheet, which statements were more difficult to evaluate—the statements about things, or the statements about people?
3. What are some ways we could complete the following sentences?
We should try not to use generalizations because _____.
It is important to use qualified statements because _____.
4. What can you do if you hear someone using generalizations to describe a person or a group of people? (Help students articulate some nonconfrontational ways to respond to generalized descriptions.)

Extending the Ideas

- Watch one or more World Wise Schools *Destination* video tapes. Ask students to listen for and record the qualified statements made in the tape. (Example: Most people in Honduras live in the mountains.)
- Ask students to collect examples of generalizations from advertising. Discuss why advertisers use generalizations and have students revise generalized statements to make them more accurate.
- Use returned Peace Corps Volunteer Julie Kaminsky's description of education in Gaoual, Guinea, in West Africa to help students recognize generalizations and qualified statements. Have them work in pairs to read the article and identify the statements that indicate that Julie Kaminsky was trying not to generalize. Then have them locate any generalizations. (For a complete list of "Volunteer Views," visit World Wise Schools on the Peace Corps web site at <http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/dp/www1.html>).



How Accurate Is It?

Directions: Read each statement carefully. Then ask yourself the following questions.

- Are all (or almost all) baseballs (or elephants, etc.) white (strong, etc.)?
- Are most baseballs (or elephants, etc.) white (strong, etc.)?
- Are some. . .?
- Are a few. . .?
- Do you know about. . .?

Put a check in the box that shows how accurate each statement is.

Statement	How Accurate It Is					
	all or almost all	most	many	some	few	don't know
1. Baseballs are white.						
2. Elephants are strong.						
3. Fish have gills.						
4. Spiders are poisonous.						
5. Candy is bad for your teeth.						
6. Babies cry.						
7. Politicians are dishonest.						
8. Teachers are smarter than children.						
9. Americans are rich.						
10. Poor people are lazy.						



School in Guinea, West Africa

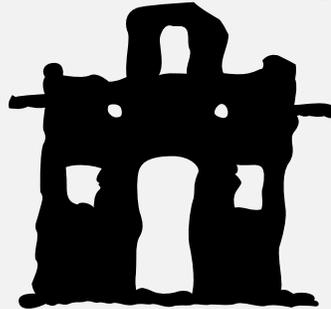
I served in Guinea in West Africa. My town, Gaoual, was predominantly Moslem, and most children attended several years of Koranic school before they started regular classes in elementary school. While children could begin school as young as six years old, most started when they were eight or nine years old. Official statistics are difficult to obtain, but I was told that around 50 percent of all children attend elementary school (grades one to six).

In sixth grade, students take a national exam to get into middle school, and about half will continue. After that, each year school children must take exams to go on to the next grade level. Many don't pass on the first try and most will repeat a grade at least once or twice somewhere along the way. At the end of tenth grade, students take an exam to attend either high school or technical school (to become a carpenter, nurse, plumber, etc.). Only about 10 percent of all children actually attend through high school. My eleventh grade class had about 40 students; the twelfth grade class had 17; the "terminal" (final year of high school) had only four students.

By the time students complete "terminal" they are usually 20 to 24 years old. Generally, children come to school Monday through Saturday. Middle school and high school students attend three classes daily, each two hours long: in the morning from 8 to 10 and 10:15 to 12:15 p.m., and in the afternoon from 12:15 to 2:15. Some subjects take only one hour, so the second half of the two-hour block the students have free time.

Students attend classes October through May, with national and local exams held in June. July, August, and September are summer vacation (the rainy season). During the month of Ramadan (a Moslem religious month when all adults fast during daylight hours) older students and teachers fast but continue to come to class. All state holidays are days off and there are one-week vacations twice a year: December 25 to January 1 and April 4 to 11, standard throughout the country.

Julie Kaminsky served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Gaoual, a town in the north-west corner of Guinea, from 1993 to 1994.



Good News/Bad News/Who Cares?

Class time needed: Approximately 40 minutes

Materials

- One “Good News/Bad News/Who Cares?” activity sheet for each student
- Pencils and paper
- Almanacs and other reference materials

Objective

- Students will recognize that there are many ways of interpreting a single piece of information.

Introduction

To develop global perspectives, students need to form the habit of reflecting on the sources of their own opinions and reactions. This activity asks students to respond to a series of facts, analyze their reactions, and compare their responses. Students will also practice viewing factual information from multiple perspectives and work to develop awareness of the hidden biases in “factual” statements.

Procedure

1. Distribute copies of the “Good News/Bad News/Who Cares?” activity sheet to students. Explain that the statements are based on accurate research and can be believed to be true.
2. Instruct students to read each statement in the “Fact” column, then quickly note their response to each statement in one of the response columns. Is the statement good news, bad news, or just an uninteresting fact (Who Cares?)? For those statements interpreted as good news or bad news, students should jot a few words in the “Why?” column to explain their feelings.
3. Once students have completed their charts, tally their responses to each statement. Are a variety of opinions represented? Or did students have similar responses to the same facts? What factors might account for this? Ask individual students to share the thinking behind their opinions. Discuss why some statements did not elicit strong opinions (e.g., some statements may not contain enough information to warrant an opinion, others may simply not provoke the interest of individual students).
4. Divide the class into small groups of two to three students. Ask students to review their individual charts. Each student will choose one statement about which he or she felt strongly and discuss the reasons for that opinion with other group members. Then the group should brainstorm a short list of people who may have reasons for forming the opposite opinion. For example, students are likely to feel strongly that a \$2.61 hourly wage for Mexican workers is bad news because that amount is very low compared to what most U.S. workers earn. However, the information could be good news for a U.S. manufacturer who is looking for a less expensive way to make products. Check in with the small groups frequently as they work; students may need help to place isolated facts into a more complete picture.



Debriefing

1. Ask a student spokesperson from each group to give some examples of the perspectives they considered and to summarize any difficulty the group had in imagining different points of view.
2. Ask students to discuss how they felt when their opinions were challenged by other students. Did any students change their opinions during the activity?
3. Revisit statement #7. Ask students if their reactions to this statement would change if it were phrased in a different, but equally true, way? For example, the statement would be equally true as “Almost 80 percent of the cars purchased in this country are made in the United States.” Point out that even “facts” can be stated in ways that emphasize a particular perspective.
4. Help students identify ways statements of fact can be checked for accuracy and bias. For example, the fact should be supported by multiple sources. We can develop the habit of looking “behind the curtain.” In other words, who is issuing the statement? Does that person or organization have a biased perspective?

Extending the Ideas

- Ask students to gather a list of facts from almanacs or other brief information sources about a Peace Corps host country and indicate whether those facts represent good news or bad news. This is a good opportunity to instruct students about the uses and limitations of various sources of information. For example, in most almanacs, infant mortality rates for a given country are reported for one year only. What at first glance appears to be a dire fact may actually be good news when statistics are compared over time.
- If the class is participating in the World Wise Schools match program, students can locate facts about their Peace Corps Volunteer’s host country and ask the Volunteer to respond in good news/bad news fashion.

Good News/Bad News/Who Cares

Fact	Good News	Bad News	Who Cares?	Why?
1. Americans spend more than \$20 million a day on snacks.*				
2. In 1993, Middle Eastern nations produced 18,446 barrels of crude oil a day. Those countries used 3,489 barrels a day.				
3. Chinese is the native language of more than one billion people. English is the native language of 300-450 million people.				
4. Each person in the United States eats more than four pounds of cucumbers a year.*				
5. The number of Internet users reached 25 million in 1995.				
6. The average hourly wage for workers in Mexico was \$2.61 in 1994.				
7. In 1993, 15.6 percent of the automobiles sold in the United States were made in Japan.				
8. The New York Yankees won the World Series in 1996.				
9. About six billion people inhabit the Earth. By 2050 the world population will increase to about 10 billion.				
10. School attendance is not required in Guatemala.				

*Source: The Great Food Almanac: A Feast of Fact From A-Z by Irena Chalmers (San Francisco: Collins, 1994). Other information is from The Universal Almanac 1996, John W. Wright, editor (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1995).



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:

