

Paper Plate Portraits

Materials

Paper plate for each participant

Procedure



Begin brainstorming about the types of stereotypes people might use without getting to know someone. Ask, “What is something someone might think about you just from looking at you?” I usually model with an example about myself. Younger children often mention judgments based on gender, age, size or clothing. My students have said, “Some people might see I’m a girl and think my favorite color is pink,” and “People might think that just because I’m a kid, I don’t know a lot.” Older students may mention stereotypes based on race, ethnicity, religion, class or sexual orientation.

Explain that students will be reflecting on the difference between what others might assume about them and how they truly are on the inside. Students will draw their faces on the outside or “bump” of the plate. They will then write a few words or phrases that they think someone might assume about them. On the inside or “crater” of the plate, students color in a heart and write words or phrases that describe their character/personality—who they really are.

For example, I have seen boys write down “rough” and “violent” on the outside of their plates and “gentle” and “loves stuffies” on the inside of their plates. One of my students wrote down “small,” “dumb” and “weak” on the outside of her plate, while she wrote down “strong,” “curious” and “loves sports” on the inside. When students are finished, give them time to participate in a short “gallery walk” to admire the collective work of the class. Then facilitate a discussion about the activity, asking such questions as:

What did you discover?

Were you surprised by anything?

Did you make any connections between your plate and a classmate’s? How did this activity help you understand the meaning of prejudice? What can we do if we notice or experience prejudice?

How can we try to stop it from happening?

Creating these “paper plate portraits” is a powerful, concrete and hands-on learning activity that encourages students to reflect on stereotyping. It also helps them see how multifaceted they are as individuals (thinking about their “outside” versus “inside” selves). The lesson helps students to better understand the complex, pervasive issues related to prejudice and stereotypes, revealing why it is important that we all challenge biased assumptions.

www.tolerance.org/.../understanding-prejudice-through-paper-plate-port...

Adapted from lesson by Vanessa D’Egidio The School at Columbia University