APPRECIATING DIFFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGING STEREOTYPES: "HOT POTATOES" AND "BAD APPLES"

Suggested Grade Level: 4-5

Length of Time: Two 30-minute sessions or one one-hour session.

Goal

- To appreciate that individuals in a group are different.
- To acknowledge that we all have stereotypes about groups of people.
- To get students to think about how stereotypes prevent people from being seen as individuals, and the importance of respecting other people.

Objectives

- Students will be able to identify and acknowledge stereotypes they hold.
- Students will be able to identify and appreciate differences.

Academic Standards

- Social Studies: Provide for the study of the people, places, and environments.
- Social Studies: Provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.
- Social Studies: Explore the concepts of likenesses and differences in school subjects.

Educators' Notes

This is a great ice-breaker or community-building activity.

Materials

Either one potato or apple for each student, large paper or whiteboard, and a marker. (This lesson can be done with other fruits or vegetables. It is often done with lemons.)

Activity

- Arrange chairs in a circle or have students sit on the floor in a large circle. (If you are able, this is the best way to do this activity.)

- As a large group, make a list of all the things that the students know to be true about potatoes or apples. Record their answers on a flip chart or the blackboard.

- Put all the potatoes or apples in the middle of the circle and have the students look through them and pick one they find interesting. Alternatively, pass out a potato or apple to each student.

  Modification: If you are working with a large group of students, you can also divide them into groups of three to four and give one apple of potato to each group.

- Ask each student/group to look at their apple or potato very carefully. Give them two or three minutes to get to know their apple or potato. Ask them if they are sure they know their potato or apple really well.

- Then put all the apples or potatoes in a pile and have the students (or one student from each group) search through the pile to find their own.

  Modification: You may need to have the students form two groups. Then have two piles so that there is plenty of space for the students to look for their apples or potatoes.

Discussion

- When the students are sure they have their own, ask students if they used any of the characteristics (stereotypes) of potatoes or apples the class listed to find them. The answer will most likely be no. Sometimes determining whose is whose is a lesson in itself.

- What did you use instead? Individual traits? Unexpected characteristics? Close observation? Parts you especially liked? Parts you especially didn't like?

- Would you say that every potato or apple is unique? Could we also say that about every person?

- Have you ever had certain ideas or assumptions about someone that changed once you got to know him or her?

- Has someone ever had certain ideas or assumptions about you that changed once they got to know you?

  Modification: To draw attention to certain kinds of stereotypes you could ask students if people have ever made assumptions about them because they are a boy or a girl, because people think they don't act in the way that some people think boys or girls are supposed to act, because of their race, because of where they live or because of their religion.

- Discuss what stereotype means. Talk about how easy it is to group things and people into categories without paying attention to individual characteristics. There is little harm in doing this with objects, but when we do this with people it is called "stereotyping," and it prevents us from seeing people as individuals as well as truly getting to know and understand them.

Talk about how when we get to know someone and get past the stereotypes we often become more understanding of and more empathetic for them. We may like them more or feel connected to them. We start to see them as an individual. It's those differences that make us special/unique/interesting.

Assessment and Evaluation

- Do students understand what a stereotype is?
- Do they understand how stereotypes can be hurtful?
- Can they appreciate that our differences make us unique and special?

Suggested Books for Students

Because of Anya, Margaret Peterson Haddix

Crow Boy, Taro Yashima

Muskrat Will Be Swimming, Cheryl Savageau

My Name is Bilal, Asma Mobin-Uddin

No Castles Here, A.C.E. Bauer

Nothing Wrong with a Three-Legged Dog, Graham McNamee

One Hundred Dresses, Eleanor Estes

Say Something, Peggy Moss

Teammates, Peter Golenbock

The Different Dragon, Jennifer Bryan

The Liberation of Gabriel King, K. L. Going

The True Story of the Three Pigs; A. Wolf, Jon Scieszka

Wings, Christopher A. Myers