

Lesson Plan: Language, Representation & Bias



Learning Objectives

- To increase knowledge and confidence in discussing subjects such as culture and difference
- To explore the way in which language, beliefs, values, thoughts, actions are connected
- To develop awareness of our own beliefs, thoughts and actions, as well as those of others
- To develop awareness of external factors that influence beliefs, thoughts and actions.

Success Criteria

- Students are able to critically reflect on factors and processes that may influence their values, beliefs and actions towards themselves and others
- Students understand that they have capacity to discern whether such influences are helpful or unhelpful, as well as capacity to make choices about the degree to which they will accept such influence.

Key Definitions

Representation:

The description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way.

Bias:

A feeling, attitude or belief towards something or someone that can be conscious or unconscious.

Stereotype:

An exaggerated belief, image or distorted truth about a person or group – a generalisation that allows for little or no individual differences or social variation. Stereotypes can be positive, negative or neutral.

Prejudice:

An opinion, prejudgement or attitude about a group or its individual members. Prejudices are often accompanied by ignorance, fear or hatred and aimed at an “out-group.”

Discrimination:

Behaviour that treats people unequally because of their group membership – can range from slights to hate crimes. Discriminatory behaviour often begins with negative stereotypes and prejudices.

Required Materials:

- Butchers paper / post it notes
- Textas / pens / pencils
- Equipment to project YouTube videos / picture sequence

Establish group rules

Introductory points:

- Inform students that today's lesson will involve exploring their own values, beliefs and culture.
- Highlight to students that whilst open conversation is encouraged, it is completely up to the students as to the extent to which they would like to share their personal information – students can speak to experiences of friends (external to the school), family, or those that they have heard in media.
- As a group ask the students to define a list of rules to guide the conversation.
- Encourage students to define their own boundaries in the discussion, however some suggestions or core rules could include:
 - Confidentiality - what students share within this class, remains in the class
 - Demonstrate respect for others' opinions by listening, not interrupting, using respectful language if providing feedback or challenging someone
 - Not making jokes or using offensive language about the beliefs, values or culture of another
 - Informing the teacher if any of the content of the class was particularly difficult or challenging
 - Participation and contribution by all – even if it does not involve disclosure of personal information
 - Understand that we are all learning

For more information regarding facilitating conversations around culture and discrimination, consider:



Facilitating conversations about racism guide

VCAA Teachers Guide: Navigating Intercultural Issues in the Classroom

Warm up activity: What is your favourite word? (5 mins)

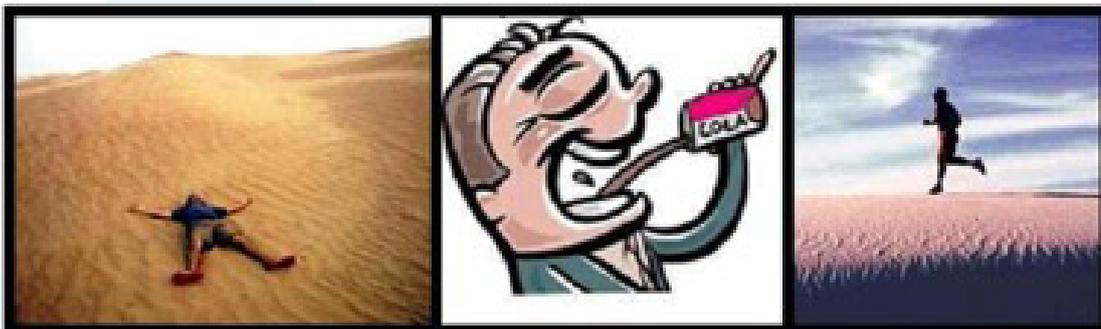
Ask students to identify their favourite word in any language and explain to the group why it is their favourite word.

Discussion: What is the meaning of representation? (5 mins)

Introductory points:

- Representation can be defined as “the description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way”.
- Representations can be true/false, positive/negative, consensual/non-consensual, about ourselves/about others.
- Representations can be made through language, images, visual cues, smells, sounds eg. A doorbell = visitor, \$ = dollars, “yes” = agreement, smell of food cooking = a meal.
- Link back to some of the feelings/meaning elicited from the students’ favourite words in the check in activity
- Representations can lead to physical and psychological responses in us based on the meanings we have attached to them eg. smelling food cooking can make us hungry/happy
- The way that we interpret and attach meaning to the representations around us is shaped by many things such as experience and culture. These perceptions and judgements are often unconscious and are called implicit bias.

Activity: What is the cartoon saying? (10 mins)



- Show students this picture sequence and ask them to write a sentence or two about what they think is illustrated and ask some students to share their interpretations.
- Discuss as a group some of the reasons students interpreted the sequence the way they did. Highlight that cultures which read from right to left rather than left to right would have a very different interpretation.



Video: Implicit Bias (3 mins)

<https://www.pbs.org/video/pov-implicit-bias-peanut-butter-jelly-and-racism/>



Activity: Breaking down stereotypes (5 mins)

- **As a group, explore the definition of a stereotype:**

“An exaggerated belief, image or distorted truth about a person or group – a generalisation that allows for little or no individual differences or social variation. Stereotypes can be positive, negative or neutral”

- **Place three pieces of butchers paper around the room, each titled with one of the following questions:**

- What stereotypes or assumptions have you heard about others?
- What stereotypes or assumptions have others made about you?
- How do you feel when you are being stereotyped / or when others are being stereotyped?

- **Invite students to provide input on each of the questions by writing their answers on post-it notes and placing at least one on each of the questions on the butchers paper.**

- Remind students that stereotypes can form across a range of characteristics: for example - ‘men don’t know how to express their feelings’, ‘people who live in rural areas love country music’, ‘Students aren’t mature enough to care about or understand politics’

- **As a group share and discuss the information gained**

- How did that activity make you feel? Was it difficult?
- Where do you see these stereotypes voiced, displayed, represented?
- If you could respond to a stereotype about yourself or someone else, what would you say?
- What can be done to counteract stereotypes?

- **Additional talking points may include:**

- Reiterate that stereotyping is a normal psychological process whereby we group and organise the mass of information we receive on a daily basis.
- It is important to acknowledge that whilst we are not responsible for the thoughts that come into our heads, we are responsible for the actions we take as a result of those thoughts.

Activity: Visualisation

activity (15 mins)

- Have students complete the following visualisation – up to 1:48 minutes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GP-cqFLS8Q4>
- Ask students to raise their hands if they visualised a white pilot, a heterosexual couple, or a male CEO of a tech company. Reiterate that there is no right or wrong answer, that what they visualise is based on what is familiar and therefore what has formed their implicit biases.
- Reflect with the class on whether the majority of them put their hands up, or whether there is diversity.
- A common outcome of this activity is for most of the participants to raise their hands up. But if decision makers are all of the same opinion and understanding, what does that mean for how and what type of decisions are made? For example, what would a single point of view mean for:
 - The food that is available in the canteen
 - The uniform options available for students
 - The holidays/events that are recognised within a school
 - Screening for job applications? Eg. Women in STEM, men in childcare, assumptions about English speaking ability
 - A man's ability to access paid parental leave?
 - A woman's capacity to continue to progress in her career following having children?
 - A person of African background being able to enter shops without being screened by security?
 - New buildings, public spaces, events being accessible for people of all abilities?
- Decisions based on multiple perspectives, needs, skill sets and values, are more well-rounded, informed and successful.
- Diversity is a strength.

