

Lesson Title: Who I Am
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Time: 80 minutes

(Created for block schedules or can be split between two class periods.)

Essential Question: “Is it better to be alone than to be someone you are not?”

Learning Objectives: By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- 1) Identify at least two ways that they are similar and two ways they are distinct from other students in the class
- 2) Describe at least two feelings that can arise when a person feels they are in the minority
- 3) Respond to the essential question, “Is it better to be alone than to be someone you are not?”

Materials:

Scenarios USA DVD “Who I Am”

(available at <http://scenariosusa.org/shop/index.html> or by calling 866.414.1044)

TV/DVD or Internet connection and LCD projector

Cross the Line Statements for Facilitators – one copy

Sample Definitions of Key Words for Facilitators – one copy

Masking tape

Flipchart paper and markers or chalkboard and chalk

Large index cards – one per student

Pens – one per student (if students do not have own)

Preparation:

- This activity requires a group that has built trust among members and the maturity to handle the depth of conversations the activity and video will likely bring up. Please use your professional judgment to determine which students/groups this lesson plan will be most successful with.
- Please make sure to have created ground rules about class discussions with your students before you teach this lesson. Those ground rules, and the ones created especially for this activity, are a critical component to ensuring the effectiveness of this lesson plan.
- Please review the list of sample definitions of key words used during this lesson to ensure that you are comfortable with these concepts prior to teaching.
- You will need to have a physical space in which all students can stand in a line shoulder-to-shoulder and then move from one side of the room to the other. You might

need to push desks or tables out of the way to make enough space. Additionally, you need to create a line on the floor with masking tape in the room's center, so that students can cross the line when they walk from one side to the other.

- Suggested homework assignment **in preparation for** this lesson: Students could collect and compare three different definitions for any one word from the following list and be prepared to share it with the class discussion at any point throughout the lesson:

Prejudice
Tolerance
Homophobia
Culture
Sexism
Heterosexism

Discrimination
Racism
Ethnicity
Gender
Sexual Orientation

Procedure:

1) Introduce the word “prejudice” and define for students from the Sample Definitions List for Facilitators by saying, “Prejudice means an attitude, opinion or feeling formed without adequate prior knowledge, thought or reason.” Ask students what people are prejudiced about. Write their responses on the chalkboard or flipchart paper.

(Facilitator’s Note: The list might include things such as race, ethnicity, culture, gender, class, appearance, religion, sexual orientation, etc. Make sure that **race** and **sexual orientation** are on the list, adding them yourself if your students do not brainstorm them.) [5 minutes]

2. Explain that people can hold prejudices for many different reasons and they can express those prejudices in their words, actions (such as violence) and inactions (condoning violence). Explain that shortly, you will show a video, created by teens from Scenarios USA, entitled “Who I Am” in which two young women explore issues of prejudice about race and sexual orientation. [2 minutes]

3. Write the following essential question on the chalkboard or newsprint, “Is it better to be alone than to be someone you are not?” Explain to students that the characters in the video will wrestle with this issue and their task, while watching the video, and for the remainder of the lesson, is to consider how they would respond to this question, which they will do at the end of the lesson. Distribute a large index card to each student and encourage them to take any notes during the video they feel would help them answer the essential question. [3 minutes]

4. Play the video “Who I Am” on DVD or stream from the Internet. Once the film has finished, have students turn to a partner and discuss their initial reactions to the film. Give students two or three minutes to discuss. Then turn their attention back to the whole group and ask the following questions:

- What preconceptions do Veronica and Hailey have about each other when they start their joint project?
 - Why does Veronica have the strength to be true to herself in the face of prejudice?
 - In the beginning, what is Hailey struggling with and why? Which prejudices does she face?
 - What changes between Hailey and Veronica and how does this change come about?
 - What feelings did you notice the main characters had when they believed they were in the minority?
 - In the end, what gives Hailey the strength to be true to herself?
- [25 minutes]

5. Next, explain that you will conduct a powerful activity called ***Cross the Line****. This activity will allow students to both acknowledge and address ways they are similar and unique from each other. The activity might make people feel a bit uncomfortable or awkward, so there will be special ground rules to help students feel more at ease.
[5 minutes]

6. Explain that for the ***Cross the Line*** activity, the following ground rules will be added to the usual set of ground rules you use in your class. They are:

Listening – This is a **silent activity** to allow everyone to experience the activity fully. This means no talking, snickering or giggling throughout.

Respect – Each student deserves to be treated with dignity and respect at all times, and particularly during this activity. Everything shared during the activity will remain **confidential** among the group and nothing should leave the room.

No Pressure – No one should feel under pressure to reveal anything about themselves that they don't want to.

Ask if there are any questions about these three ground rules. If not, go on to give the directions for the activity by explaining that you will have everyone gather on one side of the room and stand shoulder-to-shoulder. You will then read a specific statement and ask everyone who fits that description AND is comfortable sharing that with others, to walk across the line to the other side of the room and then turn around to face the group. Then you will read the next statement and people will cross the line from whichever side of the room they are on. (Facilitator's Note: It can help to give an example of a statement that fits only you, the teacher, if you feel your students are unclear about the directions.)

Lastly, if students struggle with any gray area about a particular statement, explain that they should just interpret whatever it means to them. Ask students to please not ask any questions during the activity, as it is to be conducted in silence. Ask again if there are

any questions about the activity, and if not, begin by reading the first statement. Continue reading each statement on the list until you have read them all. [20 minutes]

7. Once you have read all of the statements, ask students the following questions:

- How did it feel to participate in any part of that activity?
- Do you have any reactions about yourself or others as a result of the activity?
- What connections can you make between the experience participating in ***Cross the Line*** and the issues the characters were dealing with in “Who I Am”?
- Lastly, how could someone support another person who felt that they could not be who they truly are? [20 minutes]

8. As a closure for this activity, instruct students to return to their seats, turn over their index card and write a response to the essential question “Is it better to be alone than to be someone you are not?” Collect cards from students and thank students for their courage to participate in this lesson with you. Educators can read student responses on their own as an assessment tool for this lesson. (Optional – Collect, shuffle and anonymously read responses aloud or type up responses and distribute during the next class period for reflection.) [5 minutes]

Extension activities:

- Research local and national community-based organizations that support gay, lesbian and bisexual youth, and LGBTQ of color.
- Research key figures in your community/ history who advocated tolerance (opposite of prejudice) e.g. MLK Jr.
- Research human rights: what rights does every single human being have, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation? (United Nations) Bringing home the idea that ultimately we have more in common than we are in different
- Explore how prejudice, lack of tolerance, has led to violence in your community/ in history.
- Publish your story about prejudice and tolerance online at “Mix It Up”:
www.tolerance.org/teens

***Cross the Line** Statements for Facilitators**

Cross the Line if you . . .

- 1) Love coffee ice cream
- 2) Love playing and/or watching sports
- 3) Your biological parents have divorced, separated or never married
- 4) Were raised by a single parent
- 5) Have a good friend of another race
- 6) Consider yourself a person of color
- 7) Have personally experienced racism/discrimination
- 8) Feel that race is in issue in this school or community
- 9) Know someone that has a physical or developmental disability
- 10) Have a good friend who is gay, lesbian or bisexual
- 11) Have a good friend who is not quite sure what their sexual orientation is
- 12) Have personally experienced or witnessed a homophobic action or statement
- 13) Feel that homophobia is an issue in this school or community
- 14) Feel there is a double standard or different expectations for guys versus girls
- 15) Would actively support the rights of people who are different from you

*Activity adapted from the work of Femi, Gonzales and Matthies, Stanford University, 1985

Sample Definitions of Key Words for Facilitators

Prejudice

An attitude, opinion or feeling formed without adequate prior knowledge, thought or reason. Moreover, a prejudice cannot be changed simply by presenting new facts or information that contradicts those one already has.

Discrimination

Differential treatment that favors one individual, group or object over another. The source of discrimination is prejudice and the actions are not systematized or institutionalized.

Tolerance

Used in social, cultural and religious contexts to describe attitudes and practices that prohibit discrimination against those practices or group memberships that may be disapproved of by those in the majority.

Racism

Racial prejudice and discrimination that are supported by institutional power and authority. The critical element that differentiates racism from prejudice and discrimination is the use of institutional power and authority to support prejudices and enforce discriminatory behaviors in systematic ways with far-reaching outcomes and effects.

Homophobia

A conscious or unconscious aversion to or fear of people who are homosexual, bisexual or transgender and their communities.

Ethnicity

A group of human beings whose members identify with each other, usually on the basis of a presumed common genealogy or ancestry. Ethnic identity is also marked by the recognition from others of a group's distinctiveness and by common cultural, linguistic, religious, behavioral or biological traits.

Culture

The universal human capacity and activities to classify, codify and communicate their experiences symbolically. This capacity has long been taken as a defining feature of humans.

Gender

A cultural notion of what it is to be a man or a woman, a construct based on the social shaping of masculinity and femininity.

Sexism

Attitude, action and institutional practices that subordinate women because of their gender.

Sexual Orientation

The gender or genders of people to whom you are attracted to romantically and sexually.

Heterosexism

Attitude, action and institutional practices that subordinate people due to their gay, lesbian or bisexual sexual orientation.

[Sources: From Heroes to Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development, Lee, Menkart and Okazawa-Ray, Network of Educators on the Americas, Washington, DC 1998 and Teaching Tolerance, a publication and Web site of the Southern Poverty Law Center.]