



# UNDERSTANDING PREJUDICE THROUGH PAPER PLATE PORTRAITS

*"We must reject not only the stereotypes that others have of us but also those that we have of ourselves."*

—Shirley Chisholm

## OVERVIEW

By reflecting on the difference between what others might assume about them and how they truly are on the inside, students can better understand issues related to prejudice and stereotypes and why it is important that we all challenge biased assumptions.

## PLANNING FOR IT

### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- When you have discussed social justice issues like racism, gender stereotypes, and other forms of prejudice and bias
- As part of a larger unit or discussion around bullying, social exclusion, etc.
- As part of a unit or set of lessons on identity

### TIME REQUIRED

- < 60 minutes

### LEVEL

- Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary

### MATERIALS

- Paper plates

- Pens and/or markers

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Understand the meaning of the term “prejudice.”
- Recognize differences between what others may assume about them (especially based on stereotypes about aspects of their identities) and how they truly are on the inside.
- Identify and differentiate words and phrases describing who they really are vs. words and phrases others might use to describe them.

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- For context, read the responses to these [common questions](#) about prejudice while acknowledging the developmental needs of your students.
- Next, consider your role in unearthing biases and stereotypes with your students. Are you committed to acknowledging stereotypes that might be perpetuating prejudice and discrimination in your classroom and school? Why? What challenges might arise in the course of doing this?
- Finally, before sharing this activity with your students, create and reflect on your own portrait. What words or phrases describe who you really are, and what words or phrases represent the way others might view you?

## INSTRUCTIONS

### GETTING STARTED

- Review the meaning of the word prejudice, breaking down the word into its parts, “pre” and “judge.”
- Begin brainstorming about the types of judgments people might make without getting to know someone.
- Ask, “*What is something someone might think about you just from looking at you?*” Model with an example about yourself.
  - Younger children often mention judgments based on gender, age, size or clothing. Examples include, “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.
- Chart students' responses, writing the broader categories on the board, such as "gender" and "age."

## THE ACTIVITY

- Introduce the learning objective, and explain that students will be reflecting on the difference between what others might assume about them and how they truly are on the inside.
- First, ask students to draw their faces on the outside or "bump" of a plate.
- Then, invite students to write a few words or phrases that they think someone might assume about them (on the outside of the plate).
- Next, on the inside or "crater" of the plate, have students color in a heart and write words or phrases that describe their character/personality—who they really are.
  - For example, a student might write down "rough" and "violent" on the outside of his plate and "gentle" and "loves stuffies" on the inside of his plate.
  - Another student might write down "small," "dumb" and "weak" on the outside of her plate, while writing "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?*

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What did you learn about your students and how they view themselves and others? Did any responses surprise you?
- Did students seem to gain understanding about prejudice and appreciation for themselves and others as multifaceted individuals?
- How might the stereotypes students identified be affecting the dynamics in your classroom or school? How can you continue to work to mitigate stereotypes and prejudice in yourself and your students?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Studies with children and adolescents show that programs intended to prevent or reduce prejudice can have [significant positive effects](#), especially when they involve contact between different groups and/or efforts to promote empathy and perspective taking.

For example, numerous studies have found that when we [re-categorize people](#) who are not part of our identity group based on things that we have in common, we increase our acceptance of others and see them as part of “us.”

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Human beings “categorize” each other into identity groups based on many different features, such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and economic status; however, this process can easily lead to stereotyping and other forms of discrimination.

In fact, stereotyping and prejudice [emerge early](#) in life. Children as young as four are influenced by stereotypes about social categories like [race and gender](#), and these biases can [affect their interests](#) and behaviors.

According to [research](#), one of the most effective ways to break down barriers of prejudice, racism, and “othering” is the [cultivation of cross-group friendships](#). By teaching students to look beyond their peers’ outward-facing identities and to get to know each other on a more personal, human level, teachers can make great strides in combating bias and creating a world where everyone is valued.

## SOURCE

The original practice, [Understanding Prejudice through Paper Plate Portraits](#), is featured on the [Teaching Tolerance](#) website.