



CHECKING YOUR PERSPECTIVE

"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

—Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird

OVERVIEW

Partners explore perspective-taking, first with images, then by writing about imaginary scenarios with a partner—from both their own perspective and their peer's perspective. After swapping their written responses, they discuss the similarities and differences between them and reflect on what they learned.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- As part of a unit, classroom meeting, or advisory focused on developing social awareness, empathy, and/or perspective-taking skills
- To strengthen relationships among students
- To build a more positive classroom and/or school climate
- To create a stronger sense of trust among students

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 30 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

MATERIALS

- Writing materials
- Highlighters
- [Brain teaser images](#)
- [Scenarios on slips of paper](#)

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Practice perspective-taking, the attempt to identify and understand someone else's experience, by describing an interaction or experience from both their own perspective and someone else's
- Acknowledge that their perspective may be incomplete and faulty
- Understand the benefits of listening and receiving others' perspectives

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Empathy
- Humility

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-awareness
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open Awareness
- Focused Attention

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

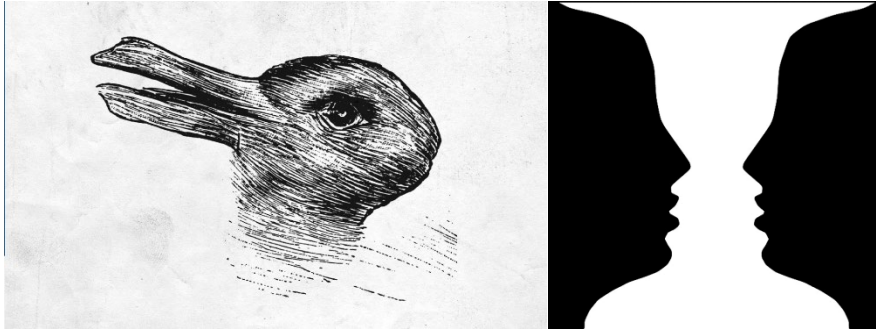
- What are the benefits of perspective-taking for you—both personally and professionally? How has this skill served you?
- As you consider your experiences with perspective-taking to date, can you recall a time when your perceptions of another person were faulty or incomplete? How did you know? What did you learn?
- What stories and/or examples could you share with others about the benefits and/or challenges you have faced when practicing perspective-taking?

- How much do you personally rely on listening and perspective-receiving when faced with a personal and/or professional conflict?

INSTRUCTIONS

OVERVIEW

Say to students: "Please take a look at this image/these images." [See [Brain teaser images doc](#) if you prefer to have students focus on additional or alternative images.]



"Without looking around, raise your hand if you saw a rabbit first. Raise your hand if you saw a duck. Do you notice how different people saw different things, even though it is the same image? This is a good example of how our perceptions - or what we see/experience - can be different.

Say to students: Have you ever heard the saying "take a walk in someone else's shoes" or "see through someone else's eyes"? (Allow for some responses and discussion.)

Sometimes, when we have a disagreement with someone, they might ask you to *think about it from their point of view*. This is called perspective-taking. It is a form of empathy, where we really try to understand how others think and feel.

Thinking about the game we just played with the images - *do you think we always know what our friends are seeing or experiencing? Do you think you would have been correct 100% of the time, if you guessed what your neighbor was going to see in the picture?* (Wait for some responses - hopefully NOs!).

That's right. We don't always see or experience things the same way as others do. AND it might be hard to know when our guesses about other people's experiences are wrong - like when we are asked to think about someone else's point of view.

[Group your students into pairs, and provide each pair with a scenario slip. Have each student pick two different color highlighters.]

Now, we are going to try this with imaginary scenarios. Read the scenario on your slip of paper and follow these steps:

1. Write 1-2 sentences about what YOU would do in this scenario
2. Take your partner's perspective, and write 1-2 sentences about what you believe your partner would do in this scenario. Remember to be kind and thoughtful about your answers.

Then we are going to swap our papers with our partner, to compare our responses and check our ability to take their perspective!

Work together with your partner, review what they have written, and compare your perspective-taking response to their actual response:

- Highlight in one color the things you got right
- Highlight in another color the things that were different.

POTENTIAL PRACTICE ADJUSTMENTS

- Alternatively, you can use this practice for conflict resolution, between two students who had an actual conflict, and invite them to do this exercise to reflect retrospectively about their actual experiences.
 - For example, have them write about the conflict from their own perspective, then how they think the other person experienced the conflict. Bring them together and use their written responses to facilitate a discussion about incorrect assumptions and differing perspectives.

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

- *First, how similar were your responses to your partners? Did you respond to the scenario the same way or very differently?*
- *How accurate were you in describing your partner's response? What incorrect assumptions did you make?*
- *What new pieces of information did you learn about your partner's perspective after reading their response?*

CLOSURE

- *What did you learn about perspective-taking from this experience?*
- When we actually ask for people's perspectives, instead of always just guessing, it is called perspective-receiving. It often gives us a much more accurate understanding of people, than perspective-taking alone (or trying to put ourselves in their shoes).
- Can you think of some things that perspective-receiving could help with? At school? At home? With friends? In our larger society? What happens when we truly try to understand others?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How did your students' (or colleagues) respond to this writing exercise? How might you adapt it?
- Are there ways to incorporate perspective-taking and receiving into your academic lessons? Mathematical problem solving? Inferencing in literature? Sharing scientific observations?
- What role does listening play in perspective-taking and/or perspective-receiving?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

According to [brain researchers](#), children learn that other people have different thoughts than their own as early as three or four years old. Studies also indicate that school-aged [children](#) and [adolescents](#) can develop and refine their ability to identify and understand other people's emotions through "perspective-taking" (also known as "cognitive empathy").

Yet recent research indicates that perspective-taking doesn't necessarily lead to an accurate understanding of others' feelings or thoughts. In fact, [25 experimental studies](#) conducted by a research team led them to determine that we can understand others best by *getting* their perspective rather than "taking" their perspective.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

When we ask students or colleagues to "perspective-take," we ask them to project themselves into the experiences of another. We say, "Imagine how your student (or colleague) is feeling or thinking in this situation," for example. While this might help us step a little closer to an understanding of others' experiences, we are also limited by our own assumptions and perceptions.

In other words—to truly understand another person, we can't just project our ideas of what they are thinking or feeling—as we are still biased by our own points of view. Rather, we need to take the time to [listen and receive](#) the perspectives that others are willing to share with us.

As teachers, this is important for us to remember, given the [power dynamics](#) between ourselves and our students. (When in doubt, ask. And be open to listening and receiving feedback based on their experiences.). Perspective-taking and perspective-receiving are invaluable communication tools we can draw on in school, at work, and in our everyday lives.

SOURCE

Adapted from a practice created by Jenna Whitehead, Ph.D.