

Unit I: Human Behavior

Grade Levels: 9-12

Time: 90-120 minutes

Lesson HI-1: The Individual: Identifying with Groups

Objectives:

- Students will be able to recognize that one's identity is linked to different communities.
- Students will be able to understand the concept of universe of obligation and apply it to one's own life.
- Students will be able to examine how assumptions can lead to faulty reasoning, and how one's prejudices can affect others.

Key Terms:

Prejudice

Partisanship

Provincialism

Herd Instinct

Hierarchy

Obligation

Stereotype

Background:

One aspect of human behavior is that we tend to put people into groups or categories. Not only do we do this with others, but we also put ourselves into groups as well, groups with whom we identify and feel comfortable. Our own beliefs will determine how well we relate to others and how much importance we place on their needs, concerns, and values.

Materials:

- "Identity Charts" (found on the Facing History website at <http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/strategies/identity-charts>)
- "Us vs. Them" Activity Sheet (found in the lesson "Everything You Know is Wrong 1: Us and Them" on the Annenberg Classroom Fact Checks website at <http://www.factchecked.org./index.php?s=everything+you+know+is+wrong>)
- Le Pen quotation, included in the following lesson plan, excerpted from The New Yorker, April 28, 1997.
- Universe of Obligation Activity Sheet (found in the lesson "Defining Community: The Universe of Obligation" on the Facing History website at www.facinghistory.org (you must be a member to see this material))
- "Confronting September 11: The Individual and Society: Choosing to Participate, Reading One" (found on the Facing History website at website <http://www.facinghistory.org/node/243>)
- Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide*, (Free Press, 1979) p.4
- "A Daughter of Islam, an Enemy of Terror" by Robin Finn, The New York Times, Oct. 25, 2001, Metro Section.
- Journals

Activities/Procedures:

1. As an introduction to the lesson ask students to consider the question, "Who am I?" As they do so, have them create an identity chart (see attached example) in their journals using words and phrases to describe the way they see themselves. Have students share their charts with the class, and then give students the opportunity to add or change any words in their charts. Students should then select one of the groups they identified and share with the class what it means to be part of that group. What are the privileges of membership? What are the challenges? In groups of three, students can use chart paper to create a class identity chart, identifying words and phrases that describe the class (11th grade, football players, etc.). Hang charts around the room and ask students to identify what they may have in common with each other. How do these labels created by the class lead to assumptions and prejudices that can be made about themselves and others?

2. Students will participate in an “Us vs. Them” activity. After sharing the background information (see above), ask students to review their identity charts and write down every group to which they feel they belong. Once students have created their lists, ask for some examples. Choose two or three non-controversial examples and have students discuss characteristics of people in that group. First ask the students who gave each example how he/she would characterize group members; then solicit input from the rest of the class. The teacher should now lead a discussion with the following questions:

- How do the group’s characteristics as described by a group member differ from the characteristics described by outsiders?
- Will every member of that group have these characteristics?
- How does the group identity affect the way you see yourself? How does it affect the way others see you?
- What are the potential benefits of making these assumptions about what group members would be like? What are the potential pitfalls?

Explain to students that it is natural to have positive beliefs about a group to which you belong, and to make both positive and negative assumptions about other groups. However, assumptions about others can sometimes interfere with us making good decisions. Hand out the “Us vs. Them” activity sheet, review each definition with the class and have students cite an example for each. Ask students to share their examples then have them answer the following questions in their journals, “How do you know when you are a member of a group or community? How do you know when you are an outsider?” Teachers may want to utilize the documentary, *Sound and Fury*, (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/soundandfury/>) depicting the culture of deafness.

3. Introduce students to the concept of Universe of Obligation by having students consider the following quotation:

“I love my daughters more than my nieces, my nieces more than my cousins, my cousins more than my neighbors. But that doesn’t mean that we detest our neighbors.”

Using “Think-Pair-Share, students can determine the meaning of this statement and decide whether they agree or disagree with it.

Ask students to create their own hierarchy of caring, asking themselves the following questions, “Who do I care about? Who do I worry about? For whom do I feel responsible?”

In their journals, have students create their own definition of a Universe of Obligation and determine if there is a relationship between this and a hierarchy of caring. Solicit and discuss student responses.

Have students complete the Universe of Obligation worksheet. Solicit and discuss student responses, then share with the class Helen Fein’s definition of Universe of Obligation, which is “the circle of individuals and groups toward whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends”. Ask students to compare this definition to their own and decide where their school would fall in their Universe of Obligation.

Students should then reflect on their responses and answer the following questions in their journals: “To whom do we feel the most responsibility? Whom do we include or exclude in our community? Which choices were both easy and difficult for you to make? Why? What are the implications regarding the choices we make?”

Evidence of Understanding:

Students will complete a written reflection of their Universe of Obligation Activity Sheet describing how it represents their identity, notion of community, and sense of responsibility. Students will also interview a parent or other family member and ask them if there was ever a time in their life when they felt separated or isolated from others and how they resolved this issue. Teachers may want to provide some sample questions for students to use as a way to gain deeper insight into the people they are interviewing.

Extension Activities: Taking Action and Giving Service:

The following reading provides an additional example of how another individual defines their Universe of Obligation. Students can create an identity chart and complete a Universe of Obligation Activity Sheet for the main subject of the reading.

"A Daughter of Islam, an Enemy of Terror" by Robin Finn, New York Times, Oct. 25, 2001, Metro Section, focuses on an American Muslim woman and her reactions to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. In the reading students learn about the identity crisis facing Asama Khan as she struggles to respond to the tragedy as an American, as a Muslim, and as a citizen of the world. While she must endure the negative stereotypes and fears directed toward Muslims that emerge in the popular culture, the tragedy has also galvanized her sense of civic responsibility, expressed in her founding of the organization called Muslims Against Terrorism.