

Eliminating Stereotypes in a New Age Society

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Overview

The purpose of this unit is to make students aware that stereotypes exist in the world today. Students should have more than a basic awareness of what components comprise their society, especially for those who are on the threshold of obtaining what will be their first major educational degree. Self awareness and self-identity are crucial in student learning and students must recognize that they are more than a statistic to the real world. Students with special needs also need to be informed of how African Americans (especially) have been perceived in history. It is not enough to go beyond slavery and racism; every possible aspect of African American history must be explored and discussed.

Since kids have a narrow knowledge of the world, they may be particularly defenseless to being subjective to media stereotypes. Animated cinema has its share of stereotypes as these characters are familiar and easy to understand. Disney heroines are always shapely, and have the same facial appearance (regardless of race). It is this type of perception that can be seen as damaging to a culture that attempts to teach self-awareness. However, the true statement may be it still serves to degrade those persons who are attempting to become rising stars. Disney, on the other hand, has always had characters that appealed to the multitudes, but somehow was exempt from accurately giving life to characters that are real versus imaginary. The closest they may have come so far was Aladdin and Pocahontas. However, there appear to be changes on the Disney horizon. One will need to wait and see how the new characters are portrayed.

Often the idea of African Americans in film only extends to those who are visible to the current youth culture. Students need awareness of great actors and actresses who paved the way for the Will Smiths, the Denzel Washingtons, the Jada Pinkett Smiths and the Spike Lees. Where is Louise Beavers and her concept of fairness? Mahalia Jackson, who sang her way through films and later married a white man, was as famous then as Sean Combs is today. The purpose of this plan is to link the two cultures and expose students to the way life was for African Americans a century or less ago. They will acknowledge those who helped to create and insure the success of the African American today.

Reaching the academic needs of each child is a challenge that expands or extends from the home into the school and community. Students must engage in effective and reflective learning with the earliest opportunities. Simple things like knowing who your caretaker is, how to walk and how to talk are the things that educational foundations are built upon. But learning about stereotypes is on another level of the academic arena. Students are often left out of knowing about the things that take them out of their comfort zone until they are often young adults and older.

This project could easily stretch into three or more weeks, time permitting. It should be given to students in the 11th or 12th grade (any comprehensive level) who have completed the dreaded standardized testing phase and teachers are searching for comprehensive and informative ways to ease students back into the learning phase. It could be utilized for an after school program on African American awareness in film. It should have multiple days for watching movies and plenty of room for reading and writing. Students will need to write about what they have learned and what is going through their minds as they see these images on the screen. In addition, there should be plenty of time for reflecting. Some students may be seeing one of these films for the first time and may need time to pause and reflect often. Whatever the case, this project could be included in any English/Language Arts curriculum, history or even Graduation Project.

This is not simply technology integration into the curriculum. The films become the curriculum as they tell the story of how stereotyping was/is used to assist African Americans in economic gain and personal development. It is not an easy process, as identifying and erasing stereotypes is not a commonplace act and requires time and dedication on the part of both the teacher and the student.

Rationale

In the real world of working and taking care of bills, adults may face challenges they have no idea how to solve once they have made the encounter. That is why teaching students, especially African American students, about stereotyping is so important. Students hear racial slurs and epithets at home and in the streets and may laugh, but should ponder as to whether or not it was about the stereotyping of another culture or race – simply put – the allowance of prejudices and ignorances. As a human race, we can no longer just sit back and allow these things to happen. We must change the way people think, and yes, **what** they learn and **how** they learn it. That is why we are teachers. Our job is to open the mind to think and to expose students to realizations.

Unfortunately, the perception of African Americans throughout history has not been a positive one. African Americans were brought over to this country for one purpose – labor. When slavery ended and the Reconstruction Era over, whites looked for some way to appeal to the audiences that were beginning to flock to the theater house. What came about was blackface in minstrel shows. Whites dressed up as “negroes” and acted and sang their way into thousands of dollars. Their portrayal of blacks as lazy, ignorant, superstitious, and happy-go-lucky seemed acceptable to whites and probably ignored by blacks (who could have been afraid of the outcomes if they had spoken out against this

travesty). Later, blacks themselves wore the makeup and became part of the minstrel follies. Today people would probably boycott such an act. The movie *Bamboozled* by Spike Lee is a must for this content area.

This project is important to me because I have seen many types of prejudice and stereotyping become acceptable. I remember the controversy over *Little Black Sambo* even as a small child. I despised Prissy in *Gone With the Wind* for her weakness, even as a slave, and identified with the stronger character of Mammy. And then there is that ridiculous book that tells of a tiger that ran around a tree so fast he became butter and it was a small dark child that challenged him to do so. If African American liberation had not taken place, with its prolific writers and challenging movie producers, I do not think that I would have enhanced my knowledge by reading.

I have asked my students about the challenges African Americans faced and they really had no concept of the ideas. They think only in abstracts of struggles by people they never met and think that rap stars will save them from despair. One can only imagine the type of stereotyping that takes place in the music industry. Ever watch American Idol?

When I consider a curriculum on film, I cannot think of a more appropriate subject than stereotyping to teach my students. Today's students have little concept of the Civil Rights Movement that does not exist beyond Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King. I think that Black History month is dwindling in its effectiveness. A need to teach students about the struggles that African Americans made in film for survival is essential. Bringing awareness of how historically African Americans were portrayed (and still are) in movies will speak life to the struggles in film of African Americans, past and possibly present.

Special education students may struggle with this project, but ultimately they will find it beneficial as they cross the threshold to a new beginning – self-awareness and self-actualization. This realization for them could be like being in an accident and having to learn to walk all over again.

No more should characters in the media be modeled as stereotypes. Racial, sexual, and religious hatred still exists in a nation that sends its factory work overseas, neglects its hungry and ravages and spends monies for another man's war. It does all of this while not taking care of nature's victims at its own home, as America allows disease and crime to run rampant. Erasing hatred is not easy; it has been around as long as man himself. However, students need to see images of themselves that reflect positive learning and acceptable manners.

This project will look at how stereotyping affects all of us. It will attempt to show that while stereotyping may have once been acceptable and profitable, students will have an insight as to the hows and whys of stereotyping. Students will determine if stereotyping was/is acceptable and how they can ensure that they do not follow this practice. The media does nothing to explain where misleading concepts originated; it just continues to serve these images on a dish that is no longer fit to eat.

Students will know the history of the Harlem Renaissance and the key players such as Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Zora Neale Hurston, to name a few. They will watch movies such as *Amos 'n Andy*, *Grease*, *The Learning Tree*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, and *A Raisin in the Sun*. Scenes from movies like *The Birdcage* and *Brokeback Mountain* and *Bamboozled* will be used. Students will learn to look for stereotypical depictions of women in movies like *The Burning Bed*, *Not Without My Daughter* and any of the movies for women on the Lifetime Channel. Seeing incorrect portraits of themselves will heighten student awareness of the effects that stereotyping has on a group of people.

I could use movies like *Pinky* – a story of a young, biracial nurse who befriends a wealthy white woman and inherits her property when she dies. Of course the controversy is that Pinky probably did something to the rich woman to get her to sign over the deed. I will attempt to show the contrast and the comparison between the two movies with the same title – *Imitation of Life*. Claudette Colbert stars in the 1934 version, where she, the white woman, is made rich from the ideas of a black woman, her maid, aptly played by Louise Beavers. In the other, made in 1959, Lana Turner has the dramatic lead and Juanita Moore is the maid with a biracial daughter who struggles with the light color of her skin. As Turner rises to fame and fortune, Moore's role is one that never changes – that of domestic.

Discussion will take place about the qualities most commonly used to define characters, why such portraits are necessary and why such use of character puts limits on the real-life view of roles in society. Character studies will be limited to include male and female, racial (African American and White) and sexual. In the year 2007 students may already have exposure to these subjects. It is my intent to solidify their prior knowledge and bring into focus what is true in today's society.

Students will be responsible for locating films on their own that depict any group in a stereotypical manner. Students will learn to look for strong character representation as well as negative images. By having students locate their own media, they will self-empower themselves by increasing their knowledge (power) and assist in their knowledge of locating and breaking down barriers that may hinder their own awareness and growth.

One cannot truly depict racial stereotyping without using a movie by Spike Lee. Mr. Lee's movies provide quality insight into the problems facing America's cities. In *Jungle Fever*, Spike attempts to show both sides of the huge racial split – the goodness of home with a partner who is of the same race and an affair, taboo by some, shows the delight that can be found in an interracial relationship. In his movie *School Daze*, this excellent film producer shows division among the African American students themselves at a fictional historical university. The “gigaboos” and the “wannabes” each have problems about the other group's skin color, hair texture and attitudes. Spike's use of known and unfamiliar faces helps to give this story quality and character. Let us not forget *Do the Right Thing*, one of Lee's early ventures.

When I consider the movie *Fame*, as outlined in our text, I do not consider Anne Meara the bad teacher as the text does. Instead, I consider Ms. Meara's character as one who is overworked and unable to deal with the pressures of a student like Leroy. Her inability to get Leroy to understand the importance of English and learning can also be met by her lack of training with special needs students who are gifted in other areas. During the dialogue, does Mrs. Sherwood (Meara) play off of Leroy's language and the possible lead into stereotyping? The author says "His is a life Mrs. Sherwood either cannot envision or does not care to envision"(Dalton 56). Why is Sherwood so bitter towards Leroy? Does his inability to read create for her visions of all black men who possibly cannot read but want to "perform"?

When comparing *Conrack* with *Fame*, one determines that *Conrack* was the better communicator for eliminating stereotypes within a given culture, or at least for trying. *Conrack* takes into consideration that the educational process for the black children needs awakening and proceeds to do that. However, he is chastised for his ability to be creative and think outside the island. When Conrack takes the children trick-or-treating, something that they have never experienced before, he is punished beyond measure; he loses his job. What is interesting is how he is still willing to fight the good fight and continue to stick up for the children by going through the town broadcasting to the residents. In our text, he openly defies the system of stereotyping by saying, "The school board of this fair city thinks that if they root out troublemakers like me the system will hold up and perpetuate itself. They think as long as blacks and whites are kept apart, with the whites getting scholarships and the blacks getting jobs picking cotton and tomatoes..."(Dalton 47). Here the school board is willing to continue in its practices of separate but unequal. This is unacceptable to the new blood (Conrack) and he is willing to challenge the old way.

Objectives

It is the objective of this unit to introduce students to stereotyping in movies so that they may identify stereotypes in the real world. Students will benefit from this experience by acknowledging that a change is needed in the way people think and act around persons who are "different" than themselves. Students will gain greater insight to who they are and what mores they will hold fast to and pass to the next generation.

Students will gather insight into whether or not stereotyping does exist, why it exists and how erasing stereotyping may or may not produce positive results for society.

Strategies

The teacher's role in this project is facilitator and coach. His/her purpose is to present the material and encourage the students to "think" before responding to the prompt, whether it is oral or written. The students are encouraged to read, watch movies, discuss, question, and decide. They will do this in either groups or as individuals.

When writing, students will be presented with a quantitative rubric that outlines the requirements as they would for any other subject. Students will also write their own memoirs, as a culminating activity, as though it were scripted for a movie.

Memoir can be a very moving experience for the students. Students come from all walks of life and although some may live in the same neighborhood, they do not all share the same experiences. Writing their memoirs is not meant to create bad experiences, but to encourage the students to look for the positive in their lives. Our text tells us that memoirs "...contain a mere slice of ordinary life – a certain time period, a special relationship, a particular theme..." (Bomer 4). For this project it would be written as a movie script, using the outline (see Appendices).

Memoir writing is about voice. Students need to know that theirs can and should be heard. Having students reflect on one particular incident is a great way for students to utilize their skills. Writing a memoir during their teen years will enable the students to have a snapshot of their lives so far. Students who are required to write an autobiography in another class or later years may find this task less difficult because they have utilized the prior writing of their memoirs.

When previewing movies, students will be presented with handouts and worksheets that outline the movie to ensure they are observing and recording information necessary to participate in discussion.

Classroom Activities

Assessments for the thematic unit are at the discretion of the teacher. Teachers know their students best and any incorporation of assessments here other than those of writing, would be fortuitous.

Each lesson is written for one class period (40 minutes) unless otherwise noted.

Unit One – Identifying Stereotypes

Lesson 1 – whole group activity

Students are introduced to the stereotyping concept. Students recognize strategies for dealing with dissention that is rooted in stereotyping and injustice. Students are introduced to content vocabulary and will use what they already know about stereotyping to formulate discussions.

Step 1

- Defining stereotype, prejudice and discrimination
- Describe the affects each has on today's society
- Identify strategies for resolution when confronted with these conflicts

Step 2

Vocabulary – students define each word for class participation and discussion

- Stereotype
- Prejudice
- Assumptions
- Discrimination
- Scapegoat

Step 3

Teacher leads group with question: *Now that you have defined the three words (stereotype, prejudice and discrimination), how do you think these three words fit into today's society?* Group discussion follows and students pose one question each relating to stereotyping for the other students to answer.

Lesson 2 – small group activity

Students review case studies that identify situations in which stereotyping is identified and must draw their own endings and suppositions to the situations.

Step 1

Teacher models expectations.

Step 2

Students are placed in groups (either teacher lead or self-directed). Students select a recorder and a spokesperson. Students are to submit ideas and concepts at the end of the class period.

Step 3

Stereotyping situations are distributed at random. Each group receives three (3) situations. As a group they discuss their three samplings. Each group records their ideas and concepts. Students are given 15 minutes to complete the task. Discussion questions include:

- What were the most ineffective ways of dealing with these conflicts?
- What role did values play in the conflicts?
- Is there such a thing as productive conflict? If so, how was it used in the scenarios?
- Have you ever been in any similar situations?

Step 4

Student spokespersons describe their scenarios and what they as a group would do if placed in that situation. In addition, they answer the required questions. Students submit scenarios and writing to teacher.

Step 5

Students will investigate the biographies of great writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Students will use these biographies to write excerpts on the writers' lives and how they influenced the African American culture. Students will present their writings to the class.

Unit 2 – Introduction to Stereotyping in Film

Lesson 1 – Whole group activity – 3 days

Students will be introduced to stereotyping via film. Students are asked if they know movies that provide examples of stereotyping. Students respond. Students are informed that today's lesson revolves around recognizing stereotyping in film.

Students are informed that the movie for the next three days is *The Learning Tree*. Students are given a worksheet in which they are only to identify instances of stereotyping.

Lesson 2 – Whole group activity

Students reflect on what they saw in the movie. Students then write three to five paragraphs (teacher discretion) relating to why they think these stereotypes were so easily acceptable during the time period of the movie. They include the following in their writing:

- Their own perceptions of the movie.
- Why the movie should be included as part of the curriculum on stereotyping?
- Why did the author include these ideas as part of the story?

Lesson 3 – Whole group activity

Students will watch scenes from *To Kill a Mockingbird* and decide if the stereotyping is the basis for the film.

Using a teacher generated worksheet, students view those scenes from the movie that deal with Tom Robinson (Boo Radley would be an acceptable choice also). Students would end the class with a discussion of why these scenes were written into the story.

Lesson 4 – Whole group activity (this activity is expected to take 6 days. The 1959 version is 125 minutes and the 1934 version is 111 minutes)

Students will watch both versions of *Imitation of Life* and compare/contrast the two, noticing differences in the stereotypes, not necessarily the performers.

By now students should be able to identify stereotyping in movies. Students will present their own versions of what is stereotyping based on the two movies. Students will use group discussions to examine the movies.

Lesson 5 – whole group activity

Students are given strips of paper with individual two words on them: homosexual (gay and lesbian); Native Americans; Jews; African Americans; Latinos, Asians: self-esteem, fairness, violence, culture, prejudice, understanding, etc. Student will be asked to write for 10 minutes how their ethnic group fits with the second word they have. Students will discuss their feelings about the word choices and what they wrote.

Unit 3 – Self-image and Self-esteem

This lesson plan is written from the African American perspective. Students will be further exposed to film that show how African Americans portray themselves on film.

Lesson 1

For the next four days students will watch Spike Lee's movie *Bamboozled*. Students will now have the experience of observing stereotypes "outside the box". Students will identify and discuss the stereotypes presented in the movie. Students will have an activity to write in 3-5 paragraphs how they felt about the movie.

Lesson 2

For this lesson, students will observe African American stereotypes in action with a short movie featuring *Amos 'n Andy*. The stories are generally focused on The Kingfish's schemes to get money. Using his lodge brothers as his con, Andy always seemed to be part of the plan in some way.

Students, after reviewing the movie, will be able to partake in effective discussion centering on their own reactions to the movie. Did the students feel that by having a successful Negro television show during the '60's, the stories showed the Negro characterizations to be true to the lives of Negroes, or was it all "just acting"?

Lesson 3

Students are given the names of actors who have participated in stereotypical films. Students will investigate the biographies of one such person and write a short narrative (1 to 3 paragraphs) on the actor. Students will then present their character identification to the entire class. This lesson is expected to take 3-4 days (library time, writing, proofreading and presenting).

Lesson 4

This lesson involves another of director Spike Lee's attempt at stereotyping, *School Daze*. Unfortunately portions of the movie involve sexual scenes. Either parental permission will be required to show the movie in full, or careful editing will be required. *School Daze* takes place on a fictional historical black college and involves two factions of African American students at odds with each other. The rationale behind this movie is to further show students that stereotyping can take place within a culture.

Lesson 5

Students are to identify stereotyping of women in society. Students should have an awareness of why things are said about women, why women are often degraded in movies and how sometimes women may not speak up for themselves. The teacher would incorporate scenes from *The Burning Bed* and *Not Without My Daughter* for students to write a compare/contrast segment using a designed rubric.

Lesson 6

This is the culminating activity for the designed unit. In this lesson students will write their own memoirs as though they were written for a play. Students will be given script outlines to use as reference. Student memoirs should include:

- Their experience in America based on their culture.
- How other cultures fit naturally/unnaturally into the writer's culture.
- Why it is necessary to identify racial/sexual differences in America that was founded on the principal of accepting diversity?

APPENDICES

References for Teachers

Amos 'n Andy (Platinum Edition). Dir. Charles Barton. Perf. Johnny Lee and Ernestine Wade. 1951. DVD. Education 2000, Inc., 2004.

Bamboozled. Dir. Spike Lee. Perf. Damon Wayans and Savion Glover. 2000. DVD. New Line Studios 2001.

Imitation of Life. Dir. John M. Stahl. Perf. Claudette Colbert and Louise Beavers. 1934. VHS. Universal, 1998.

Imitation of Life. Dir. Douglas Sirk. Perf. Lana Turner and Juanita Moore. 1959. DVD. Universal. 2004.

School Daze. Dir. Spike Lee. Perf. Lawrence Fishburne and Tisha Campbell. 1988. DVD. Sony Pictures, 2001.

To Kill a Mockingbird (Universal Legacy Series). Dir. Robert Muligan. Perf. Gregory Peck and Brock Peters. 1962. DVD. Universal, 2005.

Stereotyping Scenarios

<p>Some African American students asked Lisa (who was new to the school) to join their group to do a math project. She thought that because of the way they dressed and talked, they couldn't be very good in math. She joined another group. The African American students got an A, Lisa's group didn't.</p>
<p>Gabe was a great dancer. One day the gym teacher suggested that Gabe might want to take up ballet. Gabe liked the idea, but the more he thought about it, the more he was afraid that the other boys would make fun of him. He dropped the idea, along with lots of good exercise and a possible career.</p>
<p>Dana fell on the sidewalk. Her ankle really hurt. A white woman stopped to help her up and take her to the doctor, but Dana didn't trust the woman and said no thanks.</p>
<p>Ramona's family doesn't have much money and lives in a different part of town than Hannah. Ramona invited Hannah to a birthday party. Hannah assumed that the house would be dirty and messy and didn't go. Everyone later told her how nice the house and food were and what a great time they had.</p>
<p>Josh missed the bus and needed a ride to school. Mrs. Carter, who was 79, offered him a ride. He refused, thinking she was too old to be driving. His feet really hurt after he walked the 3 miles to school and it started raining.</p>
<p>Tyreese's friends are both African American and white. His black friends use the "n" word a lot, even around his white friends. His white friend Troy used the word and Tyreese became offended.</p>
<p>Taylor attends an all African American elementary school. She wears a brace on her left leg because she was born with a deformity. She is able to move about very freely and enjoys running and jumping as much as the next person. She wants to run track, but the track coach is very hesitant.</p>
<p>An elderly lady is walking up a very steep hill with several bags. A young man (about 24) stops his car and offers to take her home. She refuses because he has braids in his hair.</p>

PA Standards

Pennsylvania's public schools shall teach, challenge and support every student to realize his or her maximum potential and to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to:

1.1.G Learning to Read Independently

Demonstrate after reading understanding and interpretation of both fiction and nonfiction text.

- Summarize the major ideas, themes or procedures of the text.
- Relate new information or ideas from the text to that learned through additional reading and media (e.g., film, audiotape).
- Clarify ideas and understandings through rereading and discussion.
- Make responsible assertions about the ideas from the text by citing evidence.

1.6.F Speaking and Listening

Use media for learning purposes.

- Use various forms of media to elicit information, to make a student presentation and to complete class assignments and projects.
- Evaluate the role of media in focusing attention and forming opinions.
- Create a multi-media (e.g., film, music, computer-graphic) presentation for display or transmission that demonstrates an understanding of a specific topic or issue or teaches others about it.

Learning Tree Worksheet

1. Why was Newt's family respected in the community and Marcus' wasn't?
2. Why is Marcus always singling out Newt?
3. Describe the racial conditions in the community.
4. Is it possible that Newt's teacher kept her job even after the principal's saying that her ideas were out of date? Why?
5. Once Marcus was in jail, why did the sheriff and deputy keep beating him?
6. Newt feared that a riot might happen between the blacks and the whites of the town.
7. Marcus' dad killed Mr. Kiner. Why was the mob so angry at the courthouse?
8. Is this story based more on racism or on stereotyping? How?
9. The town was calmer when it was thought that Mr. Kiner had been killed by a white man. Why did it make a difference, murder is murder?
10. Marcus and his dad had the last name of "Savage". Do you think their name has any relevance to the story? Why/why not?
11. Did Kirky really have to shoot Marcus? Describe what you think Kirky is thinking when he's chasing after Marcus.
12. Why did Kirky offer Newt kindness after Kirky had killed Marcus? What stereotypes are at work here?

Mockingbird Worksheet

1. Why was Atticus called to defend Tom Robinson?
2. If Calpurnia's role in the Finch household is maid, why was she able to chastise Scout without Atticus' disapproval?
3. Why was Tom made the scapegoat for Mayella and her dad?
4. It was obvious that Tom was not guilty, yet the jury found him guilty anyway. Why?
5. What stereotypes do you see in this movie?
6. In the courthouse all the Negroes rose when Atticus walked out. Why?
7. The children wanted to watch the trial, but sat with the Negroes in the balcony. Why?
8. Who defended Tom at the courthouse more, Atticus or Scout? How?
9. Were the children aware of racial differences?
10. There are several stereotyping items actually missing from the movie. What could they be?

Script Outline

SCREENPLAY TEMPLATE

By

Christopher P. Jacobs

1. INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

A WOMAN pours her morning coffee with a slow sigh.

DISSOLVE TO

2. INT. OFFICE. DAY

The SCREENWRITER sits at his desk, staring at a computer screen. A female OFFICE ASSISTANT enters the room.

SCREENWRITER

Did you find it?

OFFICE ASSISTANT

Well, I...

(She shifts her feet
nervously)

...that is, it wasn't...

SCREENWRITER

(sighing)

Didn't think so. Go grab me
some coffee, then.

3. EXT. OFFICE. DAY

A breeze blows through the trees that shadow the entryway to the modern suburban office building.

<http://www.und.nodak.edu/instruct/cjacobs/ScreenplayTemplate.dot>

Biographies

From Harlem Renaissance

Armstrong , Louis

Biggers , John

Cullen , Countee

Delaney , Beauford

Dubois , W.E.B.

Dunbar , Paul Lawrence

Ellington , Duke

Garvey , Marcus

Hughes , Langston

Hurston , Zora Neale

Johnson , James Weldon

Lawrence , Jacob

McKay , Claude

Morton , Jelly Roll

Motley , Archibald

Sebree , Charles

Smith , Bessie