

Understanding Stereotypes

Lesson Video: Grades 3-5

Overview

Teacher: Libby Sinclair
Grades: 4 and 5
School: Alternative Elementary School 2
Location: Seattle, Washington

NCSS Standards-Based Themes: Culture; Individuals, Groups, and Institutions; Civic Ideals and Practices

Content Standards: History, Civics, Psychology

Video Summary

How would you teach your students about stereotyping? You might begin by asking, What is a stereotype? What is the impact of stereotypes on our lives? What actions can we take to stop the perpetuation of stereotypes? These are a few of the questions that fourth- and fifth-grade students in Libby Sinclair’s class examine in the video “Understanding Stereotypes.”

As the lesson begins, students define the term *stereotype* and share experiences that illustrate the impact of stereotypes on their lives. Working in groups, they recall examples of stereotypes they have encountered in literature throughout the school year. As they reflect on their research about the Negro Baseball Leagues, they realize that this topic is often not included in reference books. Students develop criteria for a persuasive letter they will write, requesting publishers to include information about the Negro Baseball Leagues in future publications.

Standards

Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies defines what students should know and be able to do in social studies at each grade level. This lesson correlates to the following themes and standards for elementary school students:

I. Culture

Explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.

V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Analyze group and institutional influences on people, events, and elements of culture.

Standards, cont'd.

X. Civic Ideals and Practices

Examine strategies designed to strengthen the “common good,” which consider a range of options for citizen action.

Content Standards: History, Civics, Psychology

About the Class

Classroom Profile

“I wanted students to be able to recognize how stereotyping happens—both in history and in our lives—its harmful effects, and what can be done about it. These kids are going on to middle school, where there is a lot more group pressure, and I want them to start thinking about what is right, compared to what people might ask them to do. That’s an important distinction.” —Libby Sinclair

Year at a Glance
Slavery
Effects of Slavery
Emancipation and Reconstruction
The Great Migration/Voting Rights
Five Themes of Geography

Libby Sinclair teaches fourth- and fifth-grade social studies at Alternative Elementary School 2 (AE2) in Seattle, Washington. When the school was started in the early '70s, it was designed to offer a more project-based, hands-on learning alternative within the public school system. Located in a suburb northeast of Seattle, AE2 is home to a diverse student body, and parents are asked to be active partners in their children’s learning process by regularly volunteering in the classroom.

Ms. Sinclair began the year with a unit on the origins of slavery in Africa and America. The class then went on to study various effects of slavery, emancipation of the slaves, Reconstruction, The Great Migration, Jim Crow laws, and voting rights. Through readings, discussion, research, and activities, the class explored the evolution of African American citizenship. In one activity, students took literacy tests like those given to African Americans at voting booths in the past.

Because baseball was spread in part by Civil War soldiers, Ms. Sinclair used the popular American pastime to examine what a stereotype is, to track the parallel spread of racial stereotypes in baseball and in society, and to study the often-forgotten history of the Negro leagues. Students interviewed grandparents or older family members about wartime stereotypes, conducted research and wrote reports on the Negro leagues, and made T-shirts to raise money for the Negro Leagues Museum. The lesson concluded by having students write letters to an author whose black history book didn’t include any information about the Negro leagues.

After the lesson on stereotypes and the Negro leagues, the class moved on to a unit called Five Themes of Geography. The five themes were location, place, movement, human-environment interaction, and region. Ms. Sinclair connected themes in baseball, African American citizenship, and geography by locating on a map the birthplace of baseball and certain baseball players, tracking migration and western expansion, and making a timeline that identified important inventions and political ideas in different regions.

About the Class, cont'd.

Lesson Background

Read this information to better understand the lesson shown in the video.

Content: Defining Stereotypes

A **stereotype** is an oversimplified, generalized concept or belief about a person, group, event, or issue, usually based on prejudice rather than on fact. People use stereotypes to analyze and categorize others by group rather than considering their individual differences. People come to see their own group as “we” and others as “they.” Stereotyping can lead to ridicule and discriminatory behavior by one person or group toward another.

A brief description of stereotyping includes:

- grouping people together based on their race, ethnicity, religion, language, customs, appearance, gender, or culture;
- denying people rights because of the group they belong to; and
- believing that one’s own group is superior; other groups are inferior.

Ways to reduce stereotyping include:

- promoting firsthand knowledge through personal experiences,
- putting oneself in another’s shoes and considering multiple perspectives, and
- working toward a meaningful goal with *others* when all share equal status.

The Negro Baseball Leagues

From the toss of the first official pitch in 1846, baseball has been America’s national pastime. Invented in America, the history of baseball is inextricably linked to the history of the nation.

In 1846, slavery was still widely practiced in the United States. Even after the Civil War and the emancipation of the slaves, Jim Crow laws kept blacks and whites from associating. Early in baseball’s history, there were a few black players on major league teams, but that ended with a ban to shut black players out. In 1867, several black baseball teams applied for membership in the National Association of Baseball Players, but they were rejected. In society at large, the Supreme Court’s 1896 ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* made “separate but equal” the law of the land.

The first Negro league was formed in 1920. Negro league games were well attended—sometimes drawing larger crowds than the major league games. A few black players signed on with the minor league, but not until 1947 did Jackie Robinson sign and play regularly with a major league team, the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Watching the Video

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them in a group.

Before You Watch

Respond to the following questions:

- How do you define *stereotype*?
- Do you consider positive-generalizations stereotypes also? (e.g., One racial group has a better sense of rhythm than another.)
- What are some reasons why people engage in stereotyping?
- How important is it to teach students about stereotypes? Why?
- What are some ways to create a classroom climate for discussing stereotypes?

Watch the Video

As you watch “Understanding Stereotypes,” take notes on instructional strategies Ms. Sinclair uses to teach students about stereotypes. Write down what you find interesting, surprising, or especially important about the teaching and learning in this lesson.

Reflecting on the Video

Review your notes, then respond to the following questions:

- What struck you about the classroom climate, background information, lesson preparation, teaching strategies, and materials used in this lesson?
- What evidence do you see of meaningful and active teaching?
- How does Ms. Sinclair connect personal experiences to the concept of stereotyping?
- How do the letters that Ms. Sinclair and the students write add to the lesson?

Watching the Video, cont'd.

Looking Closer

Here's an opportunity to take a closer look at interesting aspects of Ms. Sinclair's lesson.



Developing and Using a Rubric: Video Segment

Go to this segment in the video by matching the image (to the left) on your TV screen. You'll find this segment approximately 16 minutes into the video. Watch for about four minutes.

As you watch Ms. Sinclair work with students to develop and apply a rubric for writing persuasive letters to an author, consider these questions:

- What are the benefits of involving students in the development of an assessment tool?
- How will Ms. Sinclair's invitation to students to make a rubric "tool" help improve the quality of their letters?
- How can you relate Ms. Sinclair's work with student assessment to your own teaching?

Student Work and Assessment: Sample Letter

The lesson concluded with a persuasive letter to an author. Ms. Sinclair worked with students to develop a rubric for their letters. As students wrote first, second, and often third drafts, Ms. Sinclair urged students to return to the guidelines as they worked to improve their letters. Examine the sample letter on the next page against Ms. Sinclair's guidelines, below.

Ms. Sinclair's Guidelines for Writing a Persuasive Letter:

Goal

To persuade publishers to change what they have, and to add something to help educate people about the Negro Leagues

Tone

Tone of the letter should be positive

Criteria

- Beginning: introduction
- Middle
 - three good reasons why information about the Negro League should be included
 - specific examples
 - support your opinions
- End
- Sentences flow naturally
- Edit carefully

Watching the Video, cont'd.

Alfred ^W Elementary
7711 43rd Ave. N.E. Ser
WA 98115 Fed 7, 200

Ms Diane Patrick
% John Wiley and Sons, Inc
605 Third Ave. N.Y, New York
10158-0012

Dear

My class has been studying the Negro Leagues. We have been using books to find our information about the players that we have been studying. We want to know why there isn't any information on the Negro Leagues in Amazing African-American History and ask if you would consider adding some to your book.

You have a lot of African-American History but not Satchel Paige and Josh Gibson from the Negro Leagues. I want to ask you to put them in, and along with the other African American History. I am African-American and this is part of my History and I care about it.

One other reason I am writing about this is that little kids don't know about the Negro Leagues. I think it's important for your book to educate children of all-ages. So they will know the whole story of our history.

I hope that you change your book and about including the Negro Leagues and the player in the next edition. Thanks for reading my letter.

Sincerely
Nathane

Connecting to Your Teaching

Reflecting on Your Practice

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them in a group.

- What strategies do you use to build a supportive classroom community in order to discuss sensitive or controversial topics?
- Consider how your students differ from Ms. Sinclair's. How would you introduce stereotypes to your own students?
- What do you notice about the ways Ms. Sinclair works with students to develop and use criteria for the letter-writing assignment? How can you work with students to:
 - develop criteria for one of your own assignments?
 - encourage ongoing reference to the criteria as students refine their work?

Taking It Back to Your Classroom

- Ask your students to add to the checklist on stereotypes included as background for this lesson. Bring in several age-appropriate news articles. Divide the class into groups, and give each group two or three articles to analyze, using the checklist.
- Ask students to bring in product packages or other marketing items that promote stereotypes (e.g., sports team logos, food packaging, etc.). Have students research the origins of the logos and/or look at some of the protests and legal battles that have been waged to get rid of certain images.
- Ask your students to read a follow-up assignment to determine how writers challenge stereotypes (for example, *The Boston Coffee Party* by Doreen Rappaport challenges stereotypes of women during the American Revolution). Students may illustrate some aspect of the book that relates to stereotypes.
- Divide the class into groups and ask them to develop a booklet about stereotypes to share with students in another classroom. Work with your students to develop criteria for a booklet before they begin work. Remind students to apply the criteria as they create and refine their booklets. Plan a session for sharing the booklets with each other and then with another class.

Resources

Print Resources for Students

Patrick, Diane. *The New York Public Library Amazing African American History: A Book of Answers for Kids*. New York: Public Library Answer Books for Kids Series. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1997.

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Penguin USA, 1986.

Winter, Jonah. *Fair Ball! 14 Great Stars from Baseball's Negro Leagues*. New York: Scholastic Trade, 2002.

Resources, cont'd.

Print Resource for Teachers

Strangor, Charles, ed. *Stereotypes and Prejudice: Essential Readings*. Key Readings in Social Psychology. Philadelphia, Pa.: Psychology Press, 2000.

Web Resources for Students

African American World: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/index.html>

This PBS guide to African American history and culture features educational tools for the study of race and society.

Negro Baseball Leagues: <http://blackbaseball.com>

This site is dedicated to the history of the Negro Leagues and offers articles, resources, and news for all ages.

Riverdeep Interactive Learning: http://www.riverdeep.net/current/2002/02/022502_negroleagues.jhtml

On this site, the historical account "Life in the Negro Leagues" provides audio clips and statistics.

Web Resources for Teachers

Media Awareness Network: <http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/med/class/teamedia/stereo.htm>

This Canadian site promotes media education and includes lessons, units, and classroom activities for teaching about stereotypes.

Teaching About Stereotypes: http://english.unitecology.ac.nz/resources/units/persuading/stereotype_profiles.html

This site from the New Zealand English Online Project features exercises and suggestions for teaching about stereotypes.

Notes
