

Activities for Understanding Respect and Diversity

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Schools in the United States are highly diverse. They include students of different color, cultural backgrounds, and languages. Students in diverse schools can expand their understanding and knowledge of different cultural backgrounds. Yet, to guarantee students' fair access to education, teaching instructions should be culturally responsive to all students and engender a network of relationships based on trust, mutual respect, and valuing of diversity.

The activities below focus on engendering a network of relationships based on respect and valuing of diversity in a high school science classroom, but can be adapted to fit all ages and subjects.

Activity 1: Defining Respect

In this activity, students will define respect and explore its relationship to definitions and examples of prejudice, bias, racism and stereotype.

1. Ask the students if any of them can curl their tongue. (The ability to curl the tongue is a genetic trait) Show the students who are able to curl their tongue that you are impressed and respectful of their ability. Then, ask them how they feel about your obvious bias toward people with this trait.
2. Write the word respect on the board. Tell the students that respect can apply to one's self, to others, and to the environment. In this lesson, they will be learning aspects of self-respect and respect to others.
3. Under the word "respect," construct a table with two columns. Column heads should read "Looks Like" and "Does Not Look Like." Ask the students to brainstorm words or phrases to complete the table. For example, bias, prejudice, stereotype, and racism go under "Does Not Look Like".
4. Divide the class into small groups and give each group dictionaries. Assign each group one of the four words. Ask the group to write down a definition using their own words, and to decide if any other words or phrases from the table might fit their word's definition.
5. Allow students to share their findings. Encourage them to come up with examples of prejudice, stereotypes, racism, and bias.

Activity 2: Are traits inherited?

Students will follow the following instructions:

- Look at your classmates. Note how they vary in the color of their eyes, hair, and skin, the shape of the front hairline, and the way in which the earlobes are attached.
- Make a list of the different traits that you have observed in the class.
- Now, think about this:
 - Could these traits be inherited? From whom?
 - How would you act or behave toward these differences? Why?

Lead a classroom discussion on differences between people and reinforce mutual respect in the class.

Activity 3: Conducting a Survey

In this activity, students will survey at least ten people from different cultural backgrounds about their viewpoints on cloning animals. Students will realize that people think differently and that it is fine to have differences among people. Students should show respect to people's different viewpoints regarding this issue.

Students should prepare an illustrated explanation of the process of cloning to help people they survey understand the topic. Students findings will depend on the viewpoints of the people interviewed.

Celebrating diverse school populations

Teachers may also create strategies that encompass the whole school community. For example:

Parade of Nations: Students will be encouraged to come to school in the native dress of their country and march in a parade carrying their country's flag.

World Culture Day: This day is devoted to learning about different countries and their cultures. In this activity, classes will visit a selection of the countries offered and learn about their culture.

Show and tell: Students share some information about their countries. They may talk about their language and its components using language based games, construct a model of an item associated with their country, play a cultural game, sing a song or make or play an instrument native to the country, or share traditional food.

Ressources

Levine, J. & Miller, K. (2004). Prentice Hall Biology: Overview of teacher's edition. Pearson Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458.

<http://learningtogive.org/lessons/unit488/lesson1.html>

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