

Category 5:
Respecting Differences**Meeting 4****I Would Assume That . . .****Background**

Building a sense of community in a class can improve empathy for each other and help decrease negative behaviors toward those whom we might see as different from us. We all hold assumptions about other people, based on our own experiences, values and beliefs, and family background, and based on what our society tells us is “normal.” Some assumptions we hold can help us adapt to new situations or protect us from harm, but oftentimes, assumptions can limit our experiences and impair relationships with others.


The purpose of this class meeting is to help students recognize assumptions that they have about others, to challenge them to think about how they may treat people based on these assumptions, and to promote respect for each other’s differences. This meeting may lead to easier discussion and sharing if it follows the meeting on stereotypes.

Learner Outcomes

By the end of this session, students will be able to

- reflect on ways we make assumptions about others based on our own experiences and biases
- consider how our assumptions may influence the way we treat others, both positively and negatively
- describe two goals for challenging their own personal assumptions before interacting with someone they don’t know well

Materials Needed

- I Would Assume That . . . Stimulus Statements, one copy 
- Paper bag or basket
- Chart paper or board
- Stopwatch or timer

Preparation Needed

- Print I Would Assume That . . . Stimulus Statements from the CD-ROM and cut them apart. Select six or seven statements and place them in a paper bag or basket for the activity.
- Decide how you can creatively divide the class in half. Set up desks or chairs in two concentric circles, facing each other (half the class will sit in the inner circle facing out; half, in the outer circle facing in). Alternatively, students can stand in circles facing each other.

Class Meeting Outline

Introduction (5 minutes)

1. **When you first meet someone, how do you form an impression of who they are or what they might be like?** List student ideas on the board. *(Examples: appearance and grooming; what they wear; how they talk; where they are from; whether they are shy or outgoing; whether they look me in the eye or not; what they communicate with their body language.)*
2. **These first impressions are often based on assumptions we make about others. Our assumptions may or may not be based on facts, or even be rational.** *(Note: www.merriamwebster.com offers the following definition for "assumption": a fact or statement [a proposition, axiom, postulate, or notion] taken for granted as true.)*
3. **Today, we're going to do an activity that tests our own personal assumptions and makes us think about what the effects of those assumptions might be. We'll also consider what we can do so our assumptions don't get in the way of trying new things or getting along with others.**

Activity (30 minutes)

1. Ask students to sit in two concentric circles facing each other. Students will start out partnering with the person facing them. After each turn, the inner circle will stay seated; the outer circle will move two places to their right, so students will have a new partner with whom to discuss the next statement.
2. **I'm going to have several of you randomly select a statement from this bag. Each statement is a hypothetical situation that you might encounter—some of you may have experienced something similar to these statements personally. The person who selects the statement will read it aloud to the entire group. Once the statement is read, I'll ask you to discuss with your partner (the person facing you) what assumptions you each made about the person or situation described. Go with your first impressions or thoughts about this. Consider what you assume about the person's age, appearance, abilities, personality, gender, race or social class, or intentions. If you have an odd number of students, indicate that you will name a different person with each question to join another pair of students in their discussion.**
3. **I'll give you three minutes to discuss each statement with your partner(s). Each of you should add your insight to the discussion—don't depend on one person to do all the talking. When I call time, I'll ask each of you to share your assumptions and I'll write them on the board.**
4. Have a student volunteer randomly select a statement from the bag or box and read it to the class. Then have the partners discuss their assumptions. Call time and write down student reactions before continuing with the next statement. At the end of each situation, probe as necessary to encourage students to consider points such as the following:
 - What was your first reaction about what this person was like? How did you feel about them? (*Attracted, repulsed, disgusted, curious, wary, disappointed.*)
 - What assumptions did you make about what this person was like? What personality traits did you attribute to this person? (*Lazy, successful, kind, mean.*)
 - What assumptions did you make about their appearance? Culture? Abilities? Religion? Resources?
 - Did you assume this person was the same race as you? A member of the majority culture in our community?

- What assumptions did you make about this person's gender or gender orientation?
- What assumptions did you make about what they might be feeling or what they might need?
- If this person was well dressed, or attractive, what assumptions did you make about what they were like (personality, popularity, success, self-esteem)?
- Conversely, if this person was poorly dressed or unkempt, what impression did you have about their personality, popularity, success, self-esteem?
- If you felt let down or disappointed by this person's actions, what assumptions did you make about their intentions?

Discussion Questions (10 minutes)

1. **What did you learn about your own assumptions through participating in this activity?**
2. **Why do you think we make assumptions about other people?**
(Experiences or lack of experience, rumors, media influence, our beliefs or things our families believe, what someone else tells us, etc.)
3. **Look at the list of assumptions on the board. When can our assumptions help us?** *(They can help us when we are in a new situation and we aren't sure what to do; they may help us to be sensitive to what someone else is going through; they may protect us in a potentially dangerous situation.)*
4. **How do you think the media influence our assumptions about people? Our ideas and beliefs? Our stereotypes or biases?**
5. **How can our assumptions limit us or our ability to make new relationships or experience new things?**
6. **What ideas do you have about ways we can each challenge our own assumptions about people?** Write student suggestions on the board.
7. **What did you learn about each other in this activity? What were some things that surprised you?**

Wrap-Up

1. We often make assumptions about people without really knowing them. Making assumptions about people can limit our experiences and interfere with our ability to get along with others. When we take time to get to know individuals, we often find that we have interests, thoughts, opinions, and values in common with each other.
2. We learn to make assumptions from our experiences, from our friends and families, and from our society. Today we saw some ways that assumptions can get in the way of making relationships.
3. I want to challenge each of you to continue thinking about ways you can change your assumptions about others so that you will get the most out of life. When we can appreciate others for things we have in common and respect them for our differences, we're more likely to enjoy our time together both in and outside of school.

Curriculum Connections

Art:

- Have students create collages from magazine photographs that highlight a particular assumption about race, social class, or gender.

Social Science/Psychology:

- Have students compare ways that animals and humans "size each other up."

English:

- Assign students to write a fictional short story about two teens meeting for the first time. The teens get off on the wrong foot (their first impressions of each other are really wrong). Students can choose either a fulfilling ending (the teens finally get to know what each other is really like) or an unfulfilling ending (the teens never correct their misconceptions).