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LESSON 3

Why and How Do We Connect?

Summary

60 minutes

This lesson explores how our social identities shape the way we perceive and interact with others. Students engage in an activity where they read different versions of a story about a boy named James, prompting them to reflect on how group membership influences their judgments. Through classroom discussions, they examine concepts like in-group favoritism, bias, and stereotypes. The lesson highlights the dangers of out-group bias and introduces the concept of cross-cutting identities to bridge divides between different groups.

Learning Objectives

1. Analyze how social identity influences perceptions and behaviors toward in-group and out-group members.
2. Define bias and stereotypes and explain their impact on judgments and relationships.
3. Identify cross-cutting identities and discuss how they can bridge divides between different social groups.

How this lesson prevents violence

- **Promotes cultural norms that do not support aggression** and develops **pro social connections** in the classroom.
- Fosters **collaboration and community building** through student interviews.
- **Encourages critical thinking skills** and empathy by teaching students to recognize and challenge biases and stereotypes.

Sources

This lesson was adapted in part from *36 Questions to Help Kids Make Friends* by the Greater Good Science Center, Berkeley.

Baumeister, R.F., & Leary, M.R. (1995). The need to belong.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J.C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict.

Noba Project. (n.d.). The psychology of groups.

Gaertner, S.L., & Dovidio, J.F. (2000). Reducing intergroup bias.

Lesson Sequence

Time	Procedure	Materials Needed
2 min	Classroom Community Agreements: Review classroom agreements	Community Agreements on display
5 min	Anticipatory Set: Distribute two versions of James's story. Students read and write their thoughts in journals.	6.3-1 James's Story Student Journals
10 min	Classroom Discussion: Students share thoughts about James and discuss initial reactions.	Board Lesson Slide Deck
10 min	Direct Instruction: Lecture will focus on social identity, in-group favoritism, bias, stereotypes, dangers of out-group bias, and cross-cutting identities.	Lesson Slide Deck
2 min	Journal Reflection: Students reflect on how social identity influences their perceptions and behaviors.	Student Journals
20 min	Group Activity: Students conduct classmate interviews in pairs.	6.3-2 Student Interview Questions
8 min	Check for Understanding: Pairs share how they connect in not obvious ways.	
2 min	Journal Reflection: Students choose a prompt to reflect on.	Student Journals
1 min	Closing	

At the start of class:

1. Teacher should have groups predetermined to save time.
2. Students should have journals out

Implementation

2 min	Classroom Community Agreements	No Slide
	<p>Review: Teacher will direct students to their Classroom Community Agreements from Lesson 2. Teacher will review the agreements that students created and ask for a thumbs up from everyone to show their continued commitment to upholding these agreements during today's lesson.</p>	
5 min	Anticipatory Set	Slide 2
	<p>Activity: Students will each receive one of the two versions of the James story. Students do not know that half the class has an in-group version of the story and half an out-group version. After reading, students will silently reflect and write down their thoughts about the boy. How do they feel about him based on the story they read? What assumptions did they make?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of person is James? How would you describe him? • How do you feel about James? • What did you think about his actions in the story? <p>Version 1: James as a Good Friend (In-Group) You've known James for a while. He's part of your friend group and even sits with you at lunch. James always tries to be friendly, makes everyone laugh, and is great at soccer. But today, during class, he didn't turn in his homework and told the teacher that he "forgot" to do it. You noticed that he had his phone out for most of the time during study hall and was texting instead of working on his assignments. The teacher didn't seem happy about it and gave him a warning. What do you think of what James did?</p> <p>Version 2: James as a New Student (Out-Group) James is the new kid at school. You don't know much about him yet. He doesn't sit with your group at lunch and he's only been here for about a week. James seems nice enough, but he mostly keeps to himself. Today, during class, he didn't turn in his homework and told the teacher that he "forgot" to do it. You noticed that he had his phone out for most of the time during study hall and was texting instead of working on his assignments. The teacher didn't seem happy about it and gave him a warning. What do you think of what James did?</p>	

	<p>Teacher Script:</p> <p>In Lesson 1, we talked about our identities. Identity is how you see yourself. It's shaped by your experiences, the groups you belong to (like your family, friends, or school), and the culture around you. Today, we're going to build on that by learning about our identities within groups. You'll receive a piece of paper with a story written on it about a student named James. Please read and then quietly write down in your journals what kind of person James is, how you feel about him, and what you thought about his actions in the story.</p>	
10 min	Classroom Discussion	Slides 2-3
	<p>Student Sharing: Invite students to share their thoughts about James based on the story they read. As students share, write key descriptors and feelings on the board. Organize the descriptors into two columns: sympathetic/positive reactions and non-sympathetic/negative reactions. Note any patterns or differences in the responses.</p> <p>Reveal the Difference: Inform the class that they were given two different versions of the story. Read both versions aloud to the entire class. Highlight that in one story, James was part of their friend group (in-group), and in the other, he was a new student (out-group).</p> <p>Discussion Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you notice a difference in how you felt about James based on whether he was part of your group or a new student? • Why do you think knowing James was a friend influenced your feelings about his actions? • How do our group memberships affect the way we perceive and judge others? • Can you think of times when being part of a group made you more understanding toward someone? Or less understanding toward someone outside your group? 	



Why and How We Connect

Grade 6 - Lesson 3

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TEACHER NOTES SECTION GUIDE:

- *Italic Text – Notes for instructors*
- Normal Text – Verbal Instruction (as you get familiar with the content, you are welcome to use your own voice, but feel free to use the verbal instruction notes we have included here as a guide)



In your journals, write:

1. What kind of person is James? How would you describe him?
2. How do you feel about James?
3. What did you think about his actions in the story?



Activity: Students will each receive one of the two versions of the James story. Students do not know that half the class has an in-group version of the story and half an out-group version. After reading, students will silently reflect and write down their thoughts about the boy. How do they feel about him based on the story they read? What assumptions did they make?

- What kind of person is James? How would you describe him?
- How do you feel about James?
- What did you think about his actions in the story?

Version 1: James as a Good Friend (In-Group)

You've known James for a while. He's part of your friend group and even sits with you at lunch. James always tries to be friendly, makes everyone laugh, and is great at soccer. But today, during class, he didn't turn in his homework and told the teacher that he "forgot" to do it. You noticed that he had his phone out for most of the time during study hall and was texting instead of working on his assignments. The teacher didn't seem happy about it and gave him a warning. What do you think of what James did?

Version 2: James as a New Student (Out-Group)

James is the new kid at school. You don't know much about him yet. He doesn't sit with your group at lunch and he's only been here for about a week. James seems nice enough, but he mostly keeps to himself. Today, during class, he didn't turn in his homework and told the teacher that he "forgot" to do it. You noticed that he had his phone out for most of the time during study hall and was texting instead of working on his assignments. The teacher didn't seem happy about it and gave him a warning.



Social Identity

How we define ourselves based on the groups we belong to



Teacher Script:

This ties into the concept of social identity. Identity is how we see ourselves but our **social identities** are how we define ourselves based on the groups we belong to. Social Identity Theory suggests that we naturally favor those in our 'in-group' and may be less empathetic toward those in our 'out-group'. When we see someone as 'one of us,' we might naturally feel more connected to them. If we see them as an outsider, it can feel harder to relate.

Understanding this can help us become more aware of our biases. Recognizing that we might judge people differently based on group affiliations is the first step toward being more fair and empathetic to everyone.

- Can you think of times when being part of a group made you more understanding toward someone? Or less understanding toward someone outside your group?

Courtesy of Karen Carr Studio



Image from Karen Carr Studio

Teacher Script: Humans have always lived in groups because it offered survival benefits.

Early humans

relied on groups for protection, hunting, and sharing resources. By forming tight-knit communities, they were able to defend themselves from predators and other dangers. They could also collaborate to gather food, build shelters, and care for one another. This instinct to form groups is still with us today. While we may not be hunting in the wild, we form groups—whether it's family, friends, or even teams at school—because it makes us feel safe, supported, and connected.

Courtesy of Karen Carr Studio



Image from Unsplash

Teacher Script:

Modern research shows that being part of a group has significant mental health benefits. Studies have found that people who feel a strong sense of belonging are generally happier, less stressed, and have lower rates of anxiety and depression. Belonging to a group creates a sense of purpose and meaning in life. When you know you're part of a group that cares about you, it gives you emotional support during difficult times.



Benefits of being in groups:

1. Emotional Support
2. Reduced Stress
3. Increased Happiness
4. Collaboration and Learning
5. Protection Against Loneliness



Teacher Script:

- For example, if you're having a tough day, how might having a group help you?

Knowing that your friends or teammates are there to cheer you up can help you handle hardships better. This emotional support is one reason why friendships and social connections are so important, especially during adolescence, a time when self-identity and belonging play a huge role in emotional development.



In-Group Favoritism

When we see people in our group
in a more positive light than those
outside of our group



Teacher Script:

Our identities influence how we form groups. We tend to connect with people who share our interests, values, or cultural backgrounds because it gives us a sense of familiarity and comfort. Psychologists refer to this as **in-group favoritism**. We often view people who are part of our 'in-group'—people we see as similar to us—in a more positive light. We are more likely to be kind, understanding, and forgiving toward people in our group because we feel like we can relate to them.

This strengthens our connections with those in our groups—but it also can affect how we see those outside of our group.

Like we already discussed, our social identities can sometimes make us less empathetic towards those not in our group. This can make us **biased** towards others or rely on **stereotypes** to make judgments about them.



Bias

Unfairly liking or disliking a person or group without really knowing them



Teacher Script:

- Does anyone know what **bias** means?

CLICK TO REVEAL

Bias is when someone unfairly likes or dislikes a person or a group without really knowing them well. It's having a one-sided opinion that isn't based on all the facts.



Stereotype

A general idea or belief about a group of people that might not be true for everyone in that group



Teacher Script:

- What about stereotypes? Has anyone ever heard that word before? What does it mean?

CLICK TO REVEAL

A stereotype is a general idea or belief about a group of people that might not be true for everyone in that group. Stereotypes happen when we make quick judgments about others based on limited information.

Courtesy of Karen Carr Studio



Image from Indian History for Young Folks

Teacher Script:

It's natural to feel more connected to our own group, but allowing bias against those outside our group to develop can have serious negative consequences. History shows that when groups focus on differences rather than similarities, it can lead to misunderstandings, prejudice, and even conflict or violence.

- Can you think of an example of how focusing on differences rather than similarities can cause conflict or harm?

CROSS-CUTTING IDENTITY



Teacher Script: One way that we can focus more on our similarities rather than our differences is to look for cross-cutting identities with someone outside of our group.

Cross-cutting identities are aspects of our identity that are similar to people outside of our main group. These are the interests, values, or traits that connect us to people who might seem different at first. These can help bridge divides and reduce biases. When we find common ground with others, it becomes easier to relate and empathize with them, even if they belong to a different group.

CLICK TWICE TO REVEAL

For instance, you might meet someone who comes from a different country and speaks a different language than you, but discover that you both really enjoy playing the same video game.

You might discover that you and someone from your rival sports team both go to the same lake in the summer for vacation.

Maybe there is a girl at school that you don't get along with and really just don't understand. But you learn that you both are big sisters, and you both understand what it is like to be the oldest and always have more responsibilities than the other kids.

By focusing on these shared identities, we can build connections and reduce the negative effects of out-group bias.



In your journals:

1. Write one way your identity has connected you to a group.
2. Write an example of how being a part of that group might have disconnected you from others outside of it.



Prompt: Students answer the following prompts in their journals.

1. Write one way your identity has connected you to a group.
2. Write an example of how being a part of that group might have disconnected you from others outside of it.

Teacher Script:

Take a moment to reflect on the connections and differences you've explored in today's discussion. How do you think your social identity affects your friendships and the way you interact with others? Write down one way your identity has connected you to a group, and one way it may have divided you from others.

Closing Journal Reflection

- Something I think about differently after today.
- Something I did not like or agree with and why.
- A strong feeling I had today and why.

Journal Prompts:

- *Something I think about differently after today.*
- *Something I did not like or agree with.*
- *A strong feeling I had today and why.*

Teacher Script:

To wrap up today's lesson, I want you to take a moment to reflect on what we've talked about and what you've experienced. You can choose one of these prompts to write about in your journal.

Closing

Teacher Script:

Today, we explored how our identities shape the way we connect with others and how our perceptions can be influenced by the groups we belong to. We discussed how bias and stereotypes can arise when we focus on differences, potentially leading to misunderstandings or conflicts. However, we also learned that we can focus instead on our similarities by finding cross-cutting identities with others.

As we move forward, remember that we have the power to choose whether our