



Jen Cort

Educational Consulting

www.jencort.com

jencortedcon@gmail.com

301-318-2330

Lesson for Middle and Upper School Labeling and Unlabeling

Objective:

Students will gain understanding of the effects of labeling, stereotyping and *unlabeling*.

Preparation:

Time: 10 minutes to read lesson

Materials: Papers with the same label on both sides (i.e. “Top Athlete” on front and back)

Vocabulary:

Stereotypes: “A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing” - Merriam Webster

Label: “A word or phrase that describes or identifies something or someone” - Merriam Webster

Unlabeling:¹ Actively reclaiming, redefining the perception of an individual or group

Lesson Steps:

1. Put papers around the room with one of the following labels on each: “Teenager”, “Straight ‘A’ Student”, “Top Athlete”, “Quiet”, “Boy”, “Girl”, “Popular”, “Nerdy” (for larger groups add more words).
2. Ask the class to move silently around the room and add stereotypes they have heard on the paper about where each label appears.

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3. Ask for volunteers to stand next to each paper and in turn read the stereotypes accompanying their assigned label aloud (reminding the group that these are not necessarily stereotypes you all believe, but those you have heard.)
4. **Prompts:**
 - a. Look for a label most directly connected to you. Are these stereotypes true for all students with the accompanying label? (*Note:* Emphasize “ALL”)
 - b. Are they true some of the time for some of the people?
 - c. Have you ever felt judged because of the stereotypes of one of your labels before someone got to know you?
 - d. How does it feel to have others put stereotypes on some of your labels?
 - e. Have you ever felt you have to act like the stereotypes?
5. Ask readers to flip their paper over so the label on the clean side is facing up. Ask the class to go around the room in the same fashion as before with the focus on “Unlabeling” (actively reclaiming, redefining the perception of individuals and/or groups) and putting words they would like to be associated with that label.
6. Ask for volunteers to stand next to each paper and in turn read the unlabeling words aloud.
7. **Prompts:**
 - a. If I videotaped this week and I did not have the sound turned on, what actions might I see indicating you are ‘unlabeling’ yourself and others?
 - b. If I voice recorded this week and could not see anything, what might I hear from you indicating you are ‘unlabeling’ yourself and others?
8. Create triads or quads and ask the group to answer “How can we support each other when we see, hear or experience stereotypes and labeling?” Suggest that they serve as resources to each other during the week.

Parent Note:

We have heard concerns about the impact of the election on our students. We recognize that focusing our time only on the election process dilutes the elasticity of the skills we want to stretch beyond the election cycle. Therefore we are spending our time on skills relating to the topics through an “Election Connection”.

We spoke about the terms:

Stereotypes: A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing - Merriam Webster

Labels: A word or phrase that describes or identifies something or Someone - Merriam Webster



Unlabeling:² Actively reclaiming, redefining the perception of individuals and/or groups

As a class, we developed ideas for addressing the stereotypes about the labels present in our group and discussed ways to support each other in unlabeling.

Resources:

[Speak UP and Speak Out Pocketguide](#) or <https://goo.gl/9K0Bvj> by Teaching Tolerance and www.jencort.com/election

² Jen Cort