

LESSON H-UI-L1

The Individual: Identifying with Groups

Unit I: Human Behavior

Grade Levels: 9-12

Time: 120-150 Minutes



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Objectives

- Identify and explain the roles of individuals in a threatening situation.
- Identify the choices of an individual in a threatening situation.
- Discuss what an individual should do in a threatening situation to help others.

Key Terms

- herd instinct
- hierarchy
- obligation
- prejudice
- partisanship
- provincialism
- stereotype

Lesson Materials

- Identity charts (found on the Facing History web site at <http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/strategies/identity-charts> (background on identity charts) and <http://www2.facinghistory.org/Campus/rm.nsf/sc/IDCharts> (example identity chart))
- “Us vs. Them” student handout (found in the lesson “Everything You Know is Wrong 1: Us and Them” on the Annenberg Classroom FactCheckEd website at <http://factchecked.org/2007/lesson-plans/everything-you-know-is-wrong-1-us-and-them/>)
- Documentary: *Sound and Fury* (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/soundandfury/>)
- Le Pen quotation, included in the following lesson plan, excerpted from *The New Yorker*, April 28, 1997.
- Universe of Obligation worksheet (found in the lesson “Defining Community: The Universe of Obligation” on the Facing History web site at <http://www.facinghistory.org>; you must be a member to see this material)
- “Confronting September 11: Reading 1: The Individual and Society” (found on the Facing History web site at <http://www.facinghistory.org/node/243>)
- Accounting for Genocide by Helen Fein (Free Press, 1979), page 4
- “A Daughter of Islam, an Enemy of Terror” by Robin Finn, *The New York Times*, October 25, 2001, Metro Section.
- Journals

Lesson Background

One aspect of human behavior is that we tend to put people into groups or categories. Not only do we do this with others, but we also put ourselves into groups as well, groups with whom we identify and feel comfortable. Our own beliefs will determine how well we relate to others and how much importance we place on their needs, concerns, and values.

Lesson Plan

1. As an introduction to the lesson, ask students to consider the question: “Who am I?” As they do so, have them create an identity chart (for an example, see <http://www2.facinghistory.org/Campus/rm.nsf/sc/IDCharts>) in their journals using words and phrases to describe the way they see themselves. Have students share their charts with the class. Then give the students the opportunity to add or change any words in their charts. Students should then select one of the groups they identified and share with the class what it means to be part of that group. Ask: “What are the privileges of membership? What are the challenges?” In groups of three, have students use chart paper to create a class identity chart, identifying words and phrases that describe the class (11th grade, football players, etc.). Hang charts around the room and ask students to identify what they may have in common with each other. Ask the students, “How do these labels created by the class lead to assumptions and prejudices that can be made about yourselves and others?”
2. Ask the students to review their identity charts and write down every group to which they feel they belong. Once students have created their lists, ask for some examples. Choose two or three non-controversial examples and have students discuss the characteristics of people in each group. First ask the students who gave each example how they would characterize group members; then solicit input from the rest of the class. Then lead a discussion using the following questions:
 - How do the group’s characteristics as described by a group member differ from the characteristics described by outsiders?
 - Will every member of that group have these characteristics?
 - How does the group identity affect the way you see yourself? How does it affect the way others see you?
 - What are the potential benefits of making these assumptions about what group members would be like? What are the potential pitfalls?

Explain to the students that it is natural to have positive beliefs about a group to which you belong, and to make both positive and negative assumptions about other groups. However, assumptions about others can sometimes interfere with us making good decisions. Distribute the “Us vs. Them” student handout, review each definition with the class, and have students cite an example for each. Ask students to share their examples then have them answer the following questions in their journals:

- How do you know when you are a member of a group or community?
- How do you know when you are an outsider?

You may want to utilize the documentary, *Sound and Fury*, which depicts the culture of deafness.

3. Introduce the students to the concept of Universe of Obligation by having students consider the following Le Pen quotation:

“I love my daughters more than my nieces, my nieces more than my cousins, my cousins more than my neighbors. But that doesn’t mean that we detest our neighbors.”

Have the students participate in a Think-Pair-Share activity to determine the meaning of this statement and decide whether they agree or disagree with it.

Ask the students to create their own hierarchy of caring, asking themselves the following questions:

- Who do I care about?
- Who do I worry about?
- For whom do I feel responsible?

Have students create their own definition of a Universe of Obligation and record it in their journals. Ask them to determine if there is a relationship between this and a hierarchy of caring. Solicit and discuss student responses.

If available, have students complete the Universe of Obligation worksheet. Solicit and discuss student responses. Then share with the class Helen Fein’s definition of Universe of Obligation, which is, “the circle of individuals and groups toward whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends.” Ask students to compare this definition to their own. Have them decide where their school would fall in their Universe of Obligation.

Then have the students reflect on their responses and answer the following questions in their journals:

- To whom do we feel the most responsibility?
- Whom do we include or exclude in our community?
- Which choices were both easy and difficult for you to make? Why?
- What are the implications regarding the choices we make?

Evidence of Understanding

Have the students complete a written reflection on their Universe of Obligation worksheet. Prompt them to describe how it represents their identity, their notion of community, and their sense of responsibility.

Additional Activities and Resources

- Have students read the following reading, which provides an additional example of how another individual defines their Universe of Obligation. Students can create an identity chart and complete a Universe of Obligation worksheet for the main subject of the reading. “A Daughter of Islam, an Enemy of Terror” by Robin Finn focuses on an American Muslim woman and her reactions to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. In the reading students learn about the identity crisis facing Asama Khan as she struggles to respond to the tragedy as an American, as a Muslim, and as a citizen of the world. While she must endure the negative stereotypes and fears directed toward Muslims that emerge in the popular culture, the tragedy has also galvanized her sense of civic responsibility, expressed in her founding of the organization called Muslims Against Terrorism.

- You may also have students interview a parent or other family member and ask them if there was ever a time in their life when they felt separated or isolated from others and how they resolved the issue. You may want to provide some sample questions for students to use as a way to gain deeper insight into the people they are interviewing. For example:

Remember back to your childhood. Describe the first time you realized that *you* were different from other kids.

- Was it at school?
- Was it in the neighborhood or community?
- How did you know?
- What did others say or do?
- Note to Student: Try to encourage as much description of this time as possible.

Is there one particular time or incident that stands out as a time when you felt separated or isolated from others?

- Ask who, what, where, when, and how questions to fully describe the event.

What did you do to respond to the situation?

- Who did you talk to about it?
- What did you say or do?
- What other actions did you take?

How did you resolve the situation?

- Describe the outcome.
- Was it a successful approach?

Taking Action and Giving Service

- After students interview a parent or other family member about a time in their life when they felt separated or isolated from others, have the students explore how those issues are resolved in similar situations in the school and community. Ask them if they would propose a policy or legislation to address these concerns and have them describe it.
- Students can research on the Internet nonprofit organizations that represent a variety of different groups (example: religious institutions, ethnic groups, unions, organizations for the elderly). Tell them to identify a local chapter of the organization and contact the director to see if they can volunteer on a weekend to learn more about the organization's work.