

Judge Not, Less Ye Be Judged

Suggested Grade Level: Middle School

Relative Subject(s): Social Studies and Language Arts

Materials: a variety of clothing, jewelry, wigs (see below) or photographs of various people

Note: This activity can be done in different ways: it can be teacher-led, student-led, or done with the use of photographs.

Teacher-led version

1. Come into class in your normal clothes and with your normal hairstyle. Tell the class you will be stepping out of the room and when you return they should look at you and immediately write down their feelings, impressions, and thoughts based solely on your appearance. Leave the room and come back wearing a white lab coat (or one of the other costumes listed below). Give the students a minute to write down their impressions and leave again. you can come back wearing any of the following:

- 🐾 Dreadlocks
- 🐾 A nose ring or lip ring
- 🐾 A suit jacket
- 🐾 Ragged, dirty clothes
- 🐾 A Muslim head covering for a woman/turban for a man
- 🐾 A yarmulke
- 🐾 A spiked, colored wig
- 🐾 Jewelry, carrying a Tiffany's shopping bag
- 🐾 Glasses (if you don't already wear them)

And so on.

2. Open for discussion. Invite students to share what they wrote, and discuss how stereotypes and prejudices (pre-judgment) limit our openness and receptivity to others.

Student-led version

1. Hand out a bag to each student that has some costume element in it (see above list). In turn, have each student put the item on and have the other students write down their immediate impressions.

2. Follow-up with the same discussion.

Mix and Match

If you are leading this activity by dressing in costumes yourself, mix and match what you've brought (e.g., wear the dreadlocks tieh the suit jacket or the dirty, raged clothing while carrying the Tiffany's bag). If the students are wearing the costumes, have them mix and match. Discuss what happens when we are confronted with people who defy our stereotypes.

Nebraska Humane Society

8929 Fort Street Omaha, NE 68134 402.444.7800 www.nehumanesociety.org

Photographic version

1. Pass out photographs, and have each student write an immediate impression of the person in the photo.

Photos might include:

- 🐾 Hasidic Jew
- 🐾 Muslim woman in full head and body covering
- 🐾 Young, black man with knit cap, not smiling
- 🐾 Young, black man in designer clothes, smiling
- 🐾 Obese white women
- 🐾 Skinny white teenage girl in designer clothes
- 🐾 Person with missing teeth
- 🐾 White middle-aged man in suit
- 🐾 Person in a wheelchair

And so on.

2. When all the photos have been passed around, ask the students if they imagine details about the person in the photo (e.g., assumptions about the person based solely on their physical appearance in the photograph), and, if so, to write these details on a piece of paper. Collect these comments and the photos and randomly attach a page of student comments to a photograph. Pass the photos out again with the randomly attached comments and have students read aloud the comments while showing the photograph to the class. Could the comments be true for the accompanying photograph even though they were probably not written about this photo? Do we really know anything about people based on our stereotypes? Open for discussion. Ask students what they learned about themselves from the exercise, and how it would feel to be stereotyped based on their physical appearance alone.