

**We're not anything alike –or are we?
Improving Awareness of
Similarities & Differences**



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**Michelle E. Martin
Houghton Mifflin Co.
Faculty Programs/College Survival Consultant
Michelle_Martin@hmco.com
800-528-8323
727-869-1364**

Active Learning Strategy: Exploring Similarities and Differences – Potatoes activity

Preparing:

For this activity, you will need to have a potato or other object - enough for each student. It is possible to bring a “class set” and re-use the potatoes.

Purpose:

This activity is designed to use a non-offensive object to show similarities and differences. By using a potato or similar object, students can explore how things that seem very similar can be different, and vice versa. Facilitators can branch from potatoes into talking about similarities and differences in people and groups.

Instructions:

Have students each come up and select one potato from a pile on a table or desk. Then have students make groups of 3-5 (or place students in groups). In each group, students should discuss how the potatoes are similar and different. This can be timed to ensure that both are discussed. Have each student take a pen or marker and write his or her initials on the bottom of his or her potato (tell them to write small, especially if you are going to reuse the same potatoes with each class) Or, have them write their name on an index card, and place it upside down under the potato. Next, have students come up and place their potatoes on a table, initials side down. Make sure that the potatoes are in a single layer, and move them around a bit. Have each group of students come up and select his or her potato without touching any of the potatoes until they have made their selection. One way to do this is to have the students place the potatoes on a chalkboard ledge. You can have the students stand in front of the one they believe is theirs, without touching until you give the go-ahead. Once students have selected and picked up the potato they believe is theirs, have them switch around if needed and go back to their seats with the potato that bears their initials. Process the activity as a large group, and have students reflect in journals if desired.

Facilitator Notes:

This activity can be used with Diversity, or as an icebreaker. It could also be used within the first week of classes as a part of discussing transition to college. Baking potatoes work well if you have a small class, you can also use red potatoes. Other suggestions would be a piece of fruit or a cookie – homemade chocolate chip are great because they have more differences than those from the store, but Chips Ahoy or something similar also works. Make a plan to have students take the potatoes home and use, or drop off at a food kitchen after use (be sure to let them know they need to cut off the pen marks on the bottom).

This activity works well for beginning to talk about similarities and differences, as using potatoes is more non-threatening to students than beginning with a discussion about people. You can create a safe environment and create a common vocabulary before moving further into Diversity or other related topics with this foundation activity.

Diversity Headbands

Preparing:

Sets of headbands are needed for each group of students. An alternative is to use folders, rather than headbands. Take 5 file folders and make a sheet for the inside of each one. On each sheet, write a label and descriptor, such as the following:

I'm senile – patronize me

I'm a clown - laugh at me.

I'm not so smart - over explain things to me.

I'm a genius - ask me questions.

I'm insignificant - ignore me.

Place a sticker on the front, so that students will open the folders right side up, and with the right side forward. A set of the five different folders is needed for each group.

Purpose:

This activity is intended to begin a discussion with students concerning stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination through the use of randomly assigned labels.

Instructions:

Have students make groups of 3-5 (or place students in groups). Each group receives a set of folders. In the group, each student needs a folder. Have students hold the folder in front of them, so that when they open it, the other students in the group will be able to see the inside of the folder. Instruct students to make sure that the sticker on the folder is right side up and facing the other members of the group. Let students know that when they first open the folders, they will need to read the inside of the other group members' folders before proceeding. When you give the go ahead, students will open the front of their folder. Give students a topic to discuss in their groups, such as current movies. Students should discuss the topic in their group, interacting with each person in the group according to the inside of his/her folder. Let the discussion go 4-5 minutes, then stop students and have each person turn their folder around and read what it says. Then, as a large group, discuss how students felt during the discussion and the effects of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. Have students complete a reflection in their journals, if desired after processing this activity as a large group.

Facilitator Notes:

This is a foundation activity for beginning to discuss stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination in the classroom. Following this activity is a good time to present definitions for these terms. Doing this activity lets students experience some of the effects of stereotyping, but with labels that are randomly assigned to them, not ones that actually reflect them. I have found that some students don't care for wearing the headbands, which is why I have adapted it using file folders.

Resources

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Gorski, P. ed. (2003). Awareness Activities and Lists, Tools, and Fact Sheets. Multicultural Pavilion. EdChange.

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Marchesani, L. & M. Adams (1992). Dynamics of Diversity in the Teaching Learning Process: A Faculty Development Model for Analysis and Action. In M. Adams, ed. Promoting Diversity in College Classrooms: Innovative Responses for the Curriculum, Faculty, and Institutions. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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<http://www.sadker.org/ge-teac3.htm>

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<http://www.inform.umd.edu/EdRes/Topic/diversity/Reference/diversity.html>