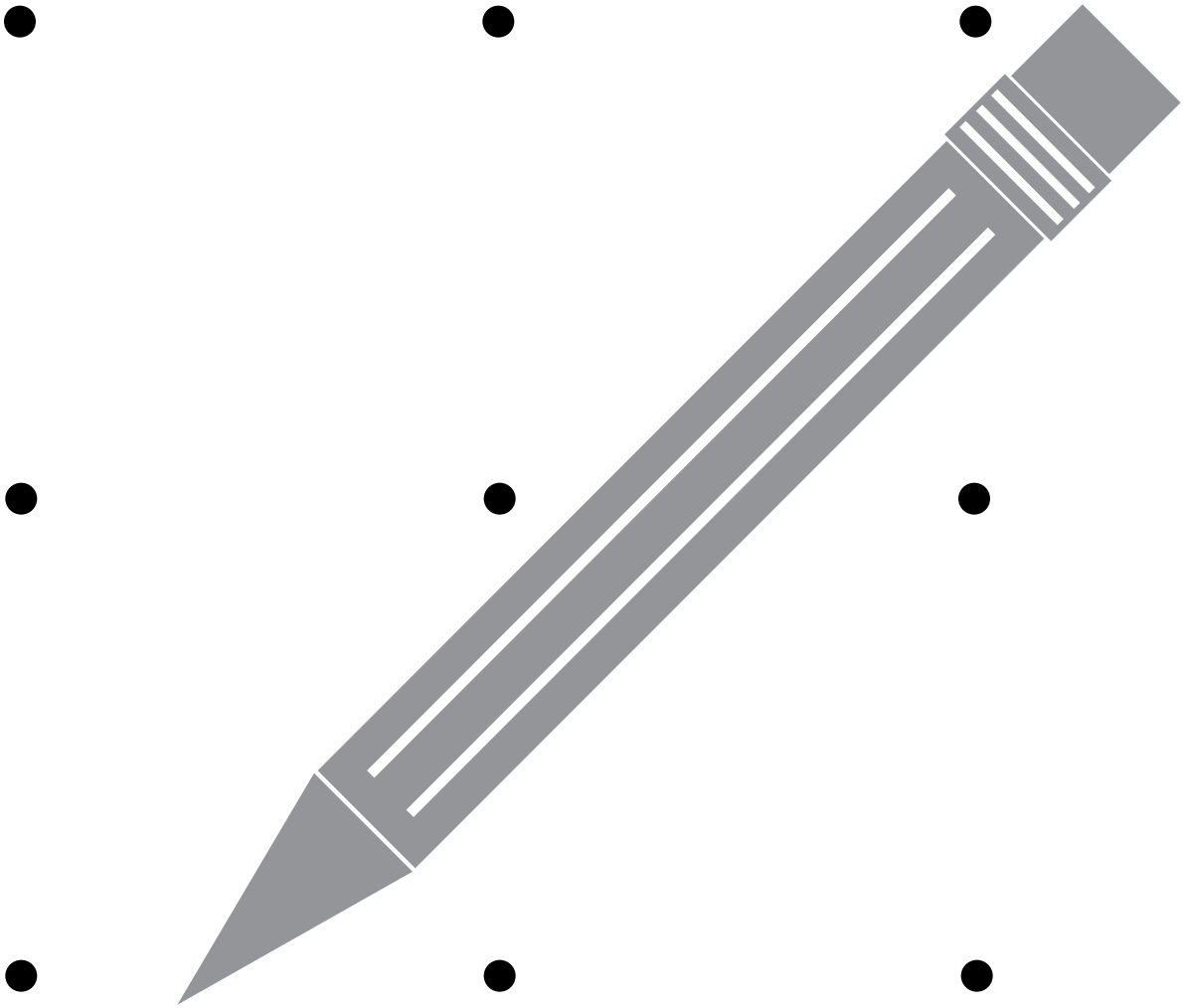
Diversity Activities for Youth and Adults



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Why is appreciating diversity important for youth and adults?

The face of the United States and its workplace is changing. A growing number of neighborhoods and communities contain a complex mix of races, cultures, languages, and religious affiliations. At the same time, the widening gap between the rich and the poor is creating greater social class diversity. In addition, the U.S. population includes more than 43 million people with physical and mental challenges.

For these reasons, today's youth and adults are more likely to face the challenges of interacting and working with people different from themselves. The ability to relate well to all types of people in the workplace is a leadership skill that is becoming increasingly important. Understanding, accepting, and valuing diverse backgrounds can help young people and adults thrive in this ever-changing society.

How can these activities boost understanding of diversity?

Learning about diversity can be fun. The activities in this publication can help participants:

- Recognize how we place self-imposed limits on the way we think.
- Discover that, in many ways, people from different cultures and backgrounds hold similar values and beliefs.
- Become more aware of our own cultural viewpoints and the stereotypes we may have inadvertently picked up.
- Accept and respect the differences and similarities in people.

When and where should these activities be used?

The activities in this publication are appropriate for use by teachers, youth leaders, child care professionals, and human service professionals. While most of the activities are appropriate for older youth (middle school and above) and adults, some of the activities may be adapted for younger children. Decsions should be based on the facilitator's knowledge of the group's cognitive level and needs.

Some of the activities—including "Connect the Dots," "First Impressions," and "Proverbs"—can be used as discussion starters or icebreakers. Others may be the basis for an entire lesson, such as "What Do You Know or What Have You Heard?" In either case, the facilitator should allow enough time for discussion at the end of each activity. Debriefing is important for dealing with unresolved feelings or misunderstandings. It is equally important to conduct activities in an atmosphere of warmth, trust, and acceptance.

Connect the Dots

Goal:

Participants will experience the fact that we often subconsciously limit our perspectives and alternatives.

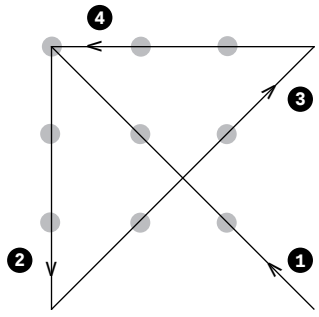
Time:

15–30 minutes, depending on discussion.

Materials:

Copies of the "Connect the Dots" handout, a pencil with an eraser for each participant, an overhead projector, and a marker.

Solution



Procedure:

Begin the activity by telling participants that you'd like to challenge their thinking. Pass out copies of the "Connect the Dots" handout and pencils. Ask participants to try to complete the puzzle following the directions on the handout. Ask participants who already know the solution or figure out the solution before time is called to please turn their paper over and allow the others to figure out the solution themselves. Give participants three to five minutes to work on the problem.

At the end of that time, have participants put down their pencils. Ask if anyone has found the solution. If so, ask that person to come to the overhead projector and demonstrate the solution for the group. If no one has found the solution, draw the correct solution for the group.

Discussion:

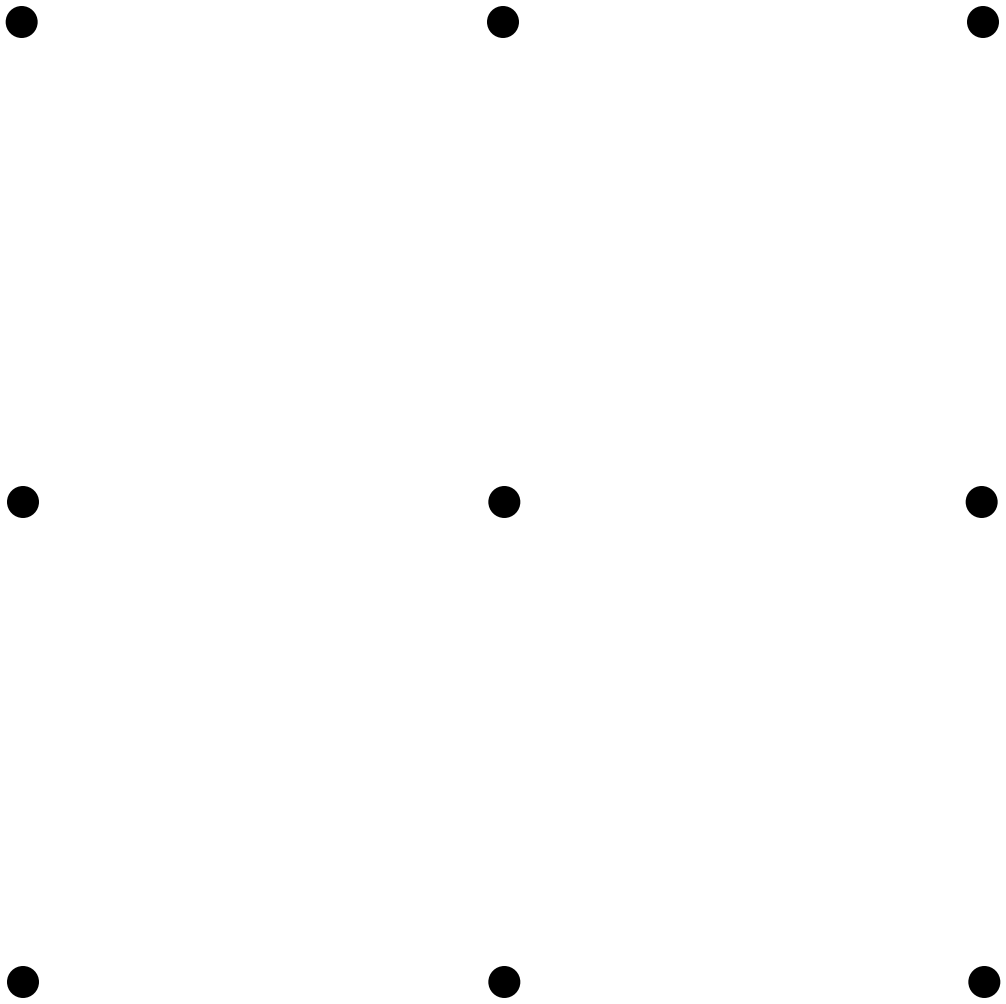
Why is it that most of us did not think of going outside the boundaries to solve the problem?

To solve the problem, we had to get outside of our usual way of thinking—outside of the box we put ourselves in. We had to literally draw outside the lines. This is what is required of us when we interact with people who are different from us. We have to look at other ways of "thinking about thinking."

Drawing outside the lines is very difficult because we are so used to our own way of thinking and our own point of view that it is hard to see other points of view. To successfully interact with people from different backgrounds and different cultures, we must learn to look at the world from many points of view.

Ask participants to share examples of situations when finding a good solution to a problem required thinking "outside of the box."

Connect the Dots



Directions:

Connect all of the dots with four straight lines. Do not lift your pencil off the paper. Do not retrace any line. Lines may cross if necessary.

First Impressions

Goal:

Participants will discover that their first impressions of people are not always true.

Time:

10–20 minutes, depending on discussion.

Materials:

Enough copies of "The Herman Grid" for each participant.

Procedure:

Pass out copies of "The Herman Grid." Ask participants to share their first impression of this image. Ask if they see gray dots in the white spaces.

Discussion:

Are the gray dots really there?

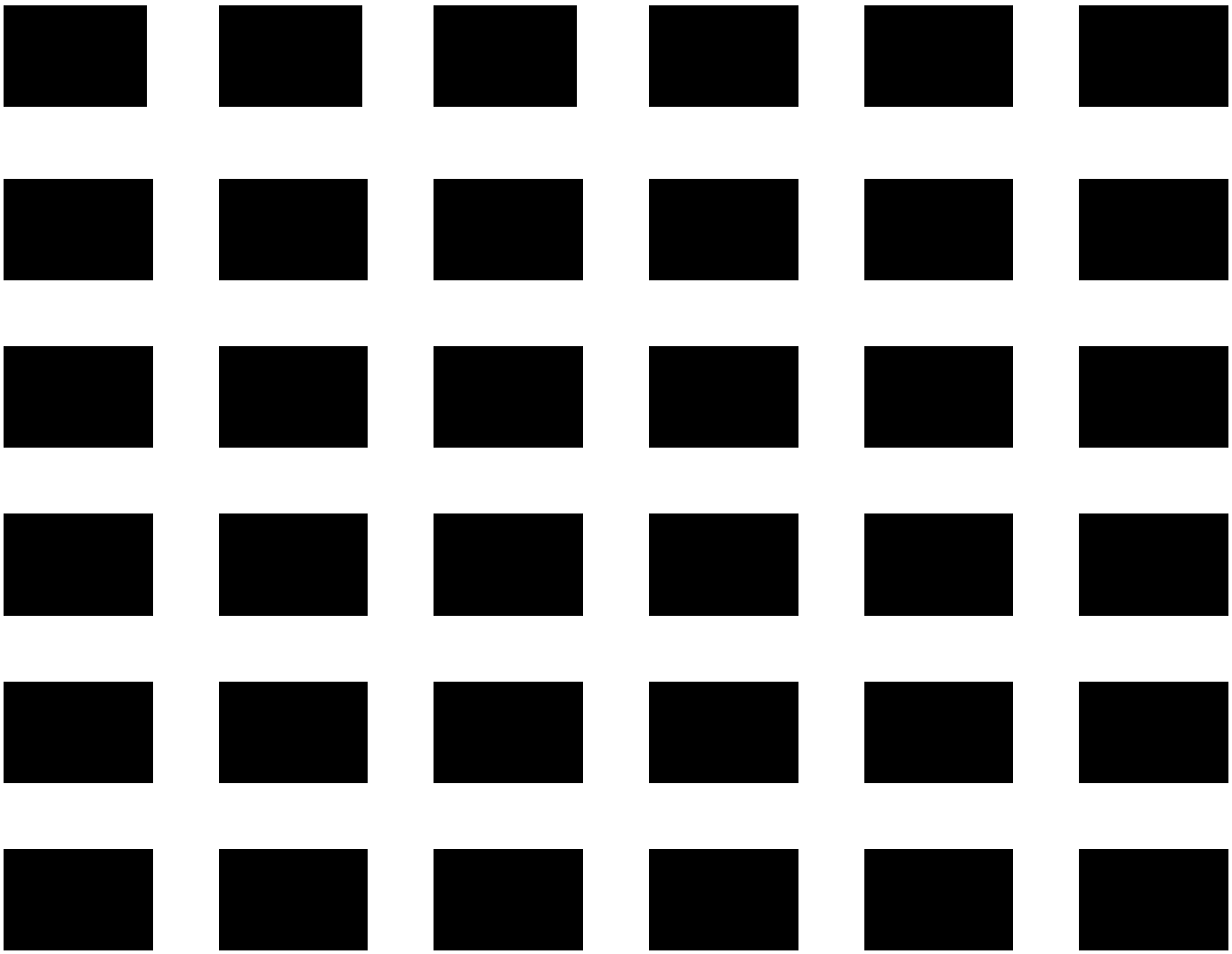
This is an example of how we sometimes see things that do not exist. Sometimes this happens when we see people, too. Ask participants to think about the following questions:

Have you ever had a wrong first impression of someone who had a different background or came from another culture?

Has someone from a different background or another culture ever had the wrong first impression of you?

Ask participants to share and discuss their examples in the large group or in small groups.

The Herman Grid



Instructions

Look at the squares and you will see gray dots appearing at the intersection of the horizontal and vertical white lines.

From Casse, Pierre. *Training for the cross-cultural mind: A handbook for cross-cultural trainers and consultants.* 2nd edition. Washington, D.C.: The Society for Intercultural Education, Training, and Research, 1981.

Proverbs

Goal:

Participants will discover that, in many ways, people from different backgrounds and cultures hold similar values and beliefs.

Time:

15–20 minutes.

Materials:

A set of paired "Proverb Cards."

Procedure:

In advance, print the pairs of proverbs on the next page on index cards so that each proverb appears on a separate card.

Count the number of participants in the group and select enough cards to equal the number of participants. If there is an uneven number of participants, the leader must participate in this activity. Make sure that the cards are selected in matching pairs (one card with a proverb from the United States and one card with a similar proverb from another country).

Mix up the cards and pass out one card to each participant. When all cards have been distributed, ask participants to move around and find the person who has a card with a similar proverb. Ask partners to stand together when they have found each other. For each set of partners, one person should have a proverb from the United States and the other person should have a proverb from another country.

After most people have found their partner, ask those who have not found their partner to raise their hands. Ask those with raised hands to search among themselves for partners. When everyone has found their partner, ask each pair to read their proverbs out loud to the group. Ask the person with the proverb from the other country to read first, followed by the person with the proverb from the United States.

Discussion:

This activity shows that although we have many differences when we compare ourselves to other kinds of people, we also have many similarities. We may have different ways of talking and different behavior patterns, but many of our most basic needs and interests are similar.

Proverbs

He makes a wine cellar from one raisin. (Lebanon)
He makes a mountain out of a mole-hill. (United States)

Even a tiger will appear if you talk about him. (Korea)
Speak of the devil and he will appear. (United States)

God is a good worker, but he loves to be helped. (Spain)
God helps those who help themselves. (United States)

You can force a man to shut his eyes, but you can't make him sleep. (Denmark)
You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. (United States)

A little in your own pocket is better than much in another's purse. (Spain)
One bird in the hand is better than two in the bush. (United States)

If you climb up a tree, you must climb down that same tree. (Ghana)
What goes up, must come down. (United States)

From the rain into the gutter. (Germany)
From the frying pan into the fire. (United States)

My house burned down, but it was a relief the bedbugs died. (Korea)
Every cloud has a silver lining. (United States)

He who is not in sight is not in the heart. (Tanzania)
Out of sight, out of mind. (United States)

Two captains sink the ship. (Japan)
Too many cooks spoil the soup. (United States)

By trying often, the monkey learns to jump from the tree. (Zaire)
Practice makes perfect (or, if at first you don't succeed, try, try again). (United States)

A person that arrives early to the spring never gets dirty drinking water. (Zaire)
The early bird gets the worm. (United States)

I will not cry over a mishap and injure my eyes. (Tanzania)
It is no use to cry over spilt milk. (United States)

Trust in God but tie your camel. (Iran)
God helps those who help themselves. (United States)

A sparrow in the hand is better than a cock on the roof. (Russia)
One bird in the hand is better than two in the bush. (United States)

Where something is thin, that's where it tears. (Russia)
A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. (United States)

Not everyone who has a cowl on is a monk. (Russia)
Don't judge a book by its cover. (United States)

As you cooked the porridge, so must you eat it. (Russia)
As you sow, so shall you reap. (United States)

Every seed knows its time. (Russia)
All in good time. (United States)

Pipe Cleaner Similarities

Goal:

Participants will discover the various things they have in common with others, regardless of background, race, or culture.

Time:

20–30 minutes.

Materials:

Enough pipe cleaners so that each participant has four. Long pipe cleaners are best, although the shorter variety may be used. Provide a variety of colors.

Procedure:

Place the pipe cleaners on a central table and ask each person to select four pipe cleaners in the colors of their choice.

Step 1.
Tell participants that their task is to shape the pipe cleaners to represent something that is very important in their life or something that is an important goal in their life. Allow about five to seven minutes. The trainer should circulate around the room to observe the creations that participants make.

Step 2.
Working with the person next to them, ask participants to try to guess what each other's creations represent.

Step 3.
As a total group, ask participants to stand if their creation represents the concept that you name. For example, say, "If your creation represents something to do with *religion*, please stand." Note the number of people who are standing. Once they are seated, call on those to stand whose creation represents another concept. Concepts may include religion, family, friends, money, education, health, or others that you notice.

When most people have had a chance to identify with one of the groups standing, ask those who have not yet stood to raise their hands. Ask one of the people with a raised hand to share what his or her creation represents. Then ask if anyone else made a creation that represents the same concept or a similar one. If so, ask them to stand. Continue until nearly everyone has had an opportunity to stand.

Discussion:

Ask what participants learned from this activity. Note the fact that everyone in the room is different. Note specifically any differences that are apparent, such as the ages of group members, the parts of the state they are from, the types of community they live in, or the positions they hold.

Ask the participants the following questions:

What did you notice about the concepts we chose to have our pipe cleaners represent?

What if this group was filled with people from very diverse backgrounds? What are the chances that many of these same concepts would surface?

Conclude by pointing out that regardless of our backgrounds, those things that are very important to us are often similar for all of us. So, if you found yourself on a deserted island with someone you consider to be very different from you, and you think you couldn't possibly have anything to talk about, think about your pipe cleaners and you will have plenty to talk about. The same principle could apply to almost any situation in which you are interacting with someone who has a background different from yours.

Chain of Diversity

Goal:

Participants will discover and recognize the many ways in which they are similar and are different from others in the group, as well as the ways in which each person is unique.

Time:

15–30 minutes, depending on the number of participants.

Materials:

Glue sticks and enough strips of colored construction paper so that each participant will have six strips. Strips should be about 1.25 to 1.5 inches wide.

Procedure:

This activity is a strong follow-up to an initial discussion about differences and similarities among people from different groups.

Introduce this activity by inviting participants to look at some of their own similarities and differences. Pass bundles of colored strips around the room. Ask each participant to take six strips. Ask participants to think of ways in which they are similar to and different from the other people in the room. On each strip, participants should write down one similarity *and* one difference. When completed, each person should have written six ways in which they are similar and six ways in which they are different from the other people in the room.

Tell participants to be prepared to share what they have written on two of their strips with the whole group. If group members are having difficulty, give some examples of ways that people may be different or similar, such as appearance, birth order, the type of community in which they live, hobbies and interests, age, parental status, or marital status. Ask each person to share two ways he or she is the same and two ways he or she is different from the other people in the room.

Start a chain by overlapping and gluing together the ends of one strip. Pass a glue stick to each person and ask the participants to add all six of their strips to the chain. Continue around the room until all participants have added their strips to the chain.

Discussion:

Ask participants to reflect on the many things they have in common, as well as the ways that each person in the group is unique. Conclude by pointing out that even though members of the group come from different backgrounds, in many ways they are the same. Display the Chain of Diversity on a bulletin board or around the doorway of your meeting room. The Chain of Diversity will symbolize the common aspects and the uniqueness that each person contributes to the group.

What Do You Know or What Have You Heard?

Goal:

Participants will recognize the widespread use of stereotypes.

Time:

20–30 minutes.

Materials:

Large sheets of newsprint, tape, markers, and wall space or other surfaces to which newsprint may be taped.

Procedure:

Before the presentation, label the top of each sheet of newsprint with the name of a different type of person or group. Try to include a variety of dimensions of diversity. Examples may include Women, Men, Teenagers, African American Males, Asian Americans, Latino Americans, Catholics, Christians, Jews, Arabs, Moslems, Amish People, Wealthy People, Poor People, The Homeless, People on Welfare, People With a Physical Challenge, Californians, Southerners, People 75 Years and Older, People Who Live in the Country, People Who Live in the City, and others.

Fold each sheet and tape the sheets on the walls or other surfaces in a manner that does not reveal the label. Leave enough space between them so that small groups can form around each sheet.

You may choose to introduce this activity with a brief discussion about culture and its impact on our behavior. Be sure to point out that culture is something we begin learning as very young children, that the rules of our culture are often not written but are learned from those around us, and that as children we generally accept these rules without question.

Tell participants you want to engage them in an activity called "What Do You Know or What Have You Heard?" Begin unfolding the posted newsprint sheets so that the labels are revealed. Tell each participant to circulate around the room to each sheet of newsprint and, with a marker, write one thing that they either "know" or that they have heard about the people or group identified by the label. Emphasize that what they write can be something that they know *or* something they have heard.

Allow enough time for each participant to add a thought to each list. Then invite participants to take a few minutes to observe the completed lists.

Discussion:

Ask participants the following questions:

What do many of the comments we have written on the lists represent?

Are they all true?

Where did they come from? (Responses might include parents, friends, teachers, books, the media, and others.)

Lead a discussion about stereotypes and the fact that we become conditioned to think about stereotypes on an almost automatic basis when we see or hear about someone whose background is different from our own. We all use stereotypes at one point or another. The important thing is that we begin to become more conscious of the fact that we are often thinking "on automatic." We must stop to ask ourselves if what we are thinking is a fact or a stereotype.

Resources/References

The activities in this publication have been adapted from activities in a variety of resources. Information about specific sources will be provided on request.

American Camping Association
50000 State Road 67 North
Martinsville, IN 46151-7902

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Prepared by Patreese D. Ingram, associate professor of agricultural and extension education.

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