



The Potato Activity

Goal:

To help youth eliminate stereotypes and to recognize the uniqueness of each individual

Time:

20-30 minutes

Materials:

A brown paper bag, one potato for each student in the class, and one potato for the teacher.

AFS Educational Goals:

Cultural Realm

Understand the concepts of “Culture” and intercultural adaptation

Cultural knowledge and awareness: To become more aware of their own culture and recognize its influence on their behavior

Personal Realm

To become more fully self-aware, willing and able to view themselves objectively and to see themselves as deeply influenced by their own culture

Procedure:

Select one potato for your demonstration and have a story in mind to describe your potato to the class. Hold up your potato in front of the class and say, “I have here a potato. I don’t know about you, but I’ve never thought that much about potatoes. I’ve always taken them for granted. To me, potatoes are all pretty much alike. Sometimes I wonder if potatoes aren’t a lot like people.”

Pass around the bag of potatoes and ask each student to take one potato. Tell each student to “examine your potatoes, get to know its bumps, scars, and defects and make friends with it for about one minute or so in silence. Get to know your potato well enough to be able to introduce your ‘friend’ to the group.”

After a few minutes, tell students that you’d like to start by introducing your “friend” to them. (Share a story about your potato and how it got its bumps.) Then tell students that the class would like to meet their friends. Ask who will introduce their friend first. (Ask for several, if not all, to tell the group about their potatoes.) When enough students have introduced their “friends” to the class, take the bag around to each person. Ask them to please put their “friends” back into the bag.

Ask the class, “Would you agree with the statement ‘all potatoes are the same’? Why or why not?” Ask them to try to pick out their “friend.” Mix up the potatoes and roll them out onto a table. Ask everyone to come up and pick out their potatoes.

After everyone has their potatoes and you have your “friend” back, say, “Well, perhaps potatoes are a little like people. Sometimes, we lump people of a group all together. When we think, ‘They’re all alike,’ we are really saying that we haven’t taken the time or thought it important enough to get to know the person. When we do, we find out every one is different and special in some way, just like our potato friends.”

Discussion:

Ask students to think about groups at school or in the community that we tend to lump together. If they have trouble thinking of groups, you may want to prompt them with some of the following groups:

- kids in band
- kids who live in the trailer park
- kids of a certain religion
- kids in the gifted class
- kids in special education classes
- kids from a certain racial or ethnic group
- kids who live in rural settings
- kids who live in the city
- all of the girls
- all of the boys
- Use groups that are relevant and meaningful for the school/community you are addressing.

Discuss answers to the following questions:

1. When we lump everyone from the same group together and assume they all have the same characteristics, what are we doing? What is this called?
2. Do you know a lot of people from the groups we tend to lump together? Do they all fit the stereotype?
3. Why are stereotypes dangerous?

Sources:

Pennsylvania State University: Diversity Activities for Youth and Adults