

Who, Me? Biased?: Understanding Implicit Bias

TEACHING TIPS

About This Lesson

A series of three short videos produced by the New York Times and POV, along with suggested writing and reflection activities, provide students in grades 9-12 the opportunity to engage in a rigorous exploration of the concept of *implicit bias*. After completing all the assignments, students will be thoroughly familiar with the meaning of the term, the ways in which implicit bias affects society, and how it affects their own thinking.

The videos are engaging and entertaining. They approach sensitive topics with a sense of humor and make complex material easy to understand, setting an upbeat, open tone that should be used as a model for student work and classroom discussions.

Interactive Tools

Students will use a variety of online tools to explore the content in the videos. The information they save or submit using these tools is automatically collected in each student's "My Work" folder. Tools include:

Take Notes: This is the primary tool students will use. It allows them to take notes on the videos, respond to prompts, and record personal reactions.

Visualize It: This tool provides tools that allow students to draw on an existing background. In this lesson, the tool is used to select answers on Likert-scale style questions.

Organize It!: This tool allows students to refer back to their saved work and copy and past text into "cards" that they can use to create an outline for discussions or their final writing assignments.

Write It!: Students use this tool to complete longer writing tasks, including their final essay. The tool provides three options: using an on-screen editor, uploading a document created in another application, or providing a link to a sharing service (e.g., Google Drive). Let students know which method they should use. The tools can also be used to upload or link to non-text-based work, such as drawings, audio recordings, or video.

Subject Areas and Standards

As with all efforts to related to multicultural education, celebrating diversity, or teaching cultural competence, the *Who Me?, Biased?* activities touch on a range of subject areas, including:

U.S. History / Civics

English / Language Arts

Social Studies

Sociology

Philosophy

Ethnic (e.g., African American, Latinx, Pacific Islander, Asian) or Women's Studies

College Prep (especially as it relates to preparing students to engage with more diverse peer groups and also tackle college-level work)

The entire series of activities is based on the NCSS C3 (College, Career, and Civic Life Framework

for Social Studies State Standards) Inquiry Arc:

Dimension 1 - “Compelling and supporting questions” are posed in both the videos and in the supporting text.

Dimension 2 – Students will be exposed to a range of sources about implicit bias, including research reports, news broadcasts, and opinions from advocacy organizations.

Dimension 3 – Students will evaluate and reflect on the value of each source, connecting the sources’ claims to their own perceptions and experiences of implicit bias

Dimension 4 – Student will be invited to discuss and consider possible actions based on their new understandings of implicit bias.

Activities are also writing intensive and support these Common Core English/Language Arts Standards:

W1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

W2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

W4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

W6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

W9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

W10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

If you also choose to supplement online assignments with discussion (and we recommend that you do), you’ll also address these Common Core Speaking and Listening Standards:

SL1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

SL3. Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

SL4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

General Teaching Strategies

Before You Start

Familiarize yourself with the technology so you can explain it to students as needed.

Review each page of the lesson and create a “game plan” for how you will handle each one:

- Will students complete it individually or together as a class? If it is individually, will it be done during class or outside of class? And how will students access the site?

- Will you require only the basics or also ask students to complete tasks labelled as “alternative”?
- How much prior scaffolding will students need to complete the task and how will that be provided?
- How will you help students connect their work to topics they have studied or are currently working on as part of their core curriculum?

Create a timeline:

- How long will students have to complete assigned tasks?
- At what points will you convene the class for discussion or other collaborative activities?

Create Safe Space

As a society, we’re not very skilled at talking about our experiences with race, racism, or other forms of prejudice. To prepare your students to productively engage with lesson materials and one another, you may want to involve them in setting some class ground rules for discussion (e.g., no put-downs, speak in the first person, etc.). You may also want to remind them that this isn’t a contest to see who is the least biased; you can acknowledge up front that we are all biased in some way. Bias is part of being human.

Also, be aware that responses to the videos may be different for those who have been victims of discrimination as compared with those who belong to privileged groups. Raising issues of bias or injustice can trigger everyone’s emotions. Be prepared to help vulnerable students cope with their responses to injustice and to help students who may be responsible for injuring others to get past feelings of guilt. It would also be a good idea to let families, as well as other faculty, staff, and administrators in your building know about the lesson so they can be supportive of students who struggle with the issues.

Selecting Activities / Differentiating Instruction

Each of the videos is accompanied by basic assignments that should be required for everyone.

In some instances there are also alternative suggestions. These are also appropriate for all students, but they aren’t essential to the core of the lesson. Let students know whether you expect them to complete these options or not.

In many instances there are also suggestions for advanced level students. These are helpful for all students to see, but they are intended for students in upper grade levels (e.g., a senior as opposed to a sophomore) or students capable of honors-level work. Again, make sure that students are clear about which assignments you expect them to complete.

Using Questions as Discussion Prompts

The text accompanying each video poses questions intended to help the focus of note taking and analysis. These questions can also be used as discussion prompts, though we recommend against replacing written assignments with discussion. That’s because students will need to refer back to their notes in order to complete their final essays.

Different Types of Writing

The lesson intentionally provides a variety of writing tasks, including: note taking, short answers, summaries, and essays. Prior to beginning the lesson, you may want to review with students the differences between these tasks, including which will be primarily for their own use and which will be for a wider audience (and how audience affects their writing choices).

Pacing

One of the advantages of an online module is that students can work at their own pace, viewing videos and refining notes until they fully understand the content. In this case, students will also benefit from the opportunity to process what may be difficult issues with their classmates and your guidance. So you may want to set a calendar that includes specific dates for discussion of specific videos.

Because the content goes beyond facts and will touch many students' lives at a very deep level, and because there is substantial writing involved, this lesson will take most students several days to complete (not including the time they take to write their final essay).

Grading/Assessment

Because understanding the concept of implicit bias requires a certain level of metacognitive awareness, each activity requires some level of personal reflection. While it is fine to require completion of these reflection assignments, we strongly recommend that they not be graded and that you tell students in very clear terms that the goal is not for them to feel judged for their existing biases. If students feel that you are judgmental, rather than encouraging, they are likely to shut down and will not benefit from this lesson.

Grading of the remaining assignments is up to you. For short answers and essays, including the final essay, we recommend providing students with a rubric that reflects your expectations. Use your existing rubric(s), or consider something like this:

Excellent

Writing is clear and grammatically correct; subject-specific vocabulary is used correctly; organization of information supports a logical flow that is easy for a reader to follow; responses to questions are accurate and indicate a deep understanding of the issue(s); when appropriate, claims are backed by document-based evidence properly cited; content synthesizes facts with personal reflection to arrive at conclusions; the overall essay exhibits creative or divergent thinking.

Good

Writing is clear and well organized; subject-specific vocabulary is used correctly; responses to questions are accurate and also reflect some degree of personal reflection; claims are back by document-based evidence properly cited.

Acceptable

Responses to questions are generally accurate and supported by appropriate evidence, but writing isn't always clear and there isn't much to indicate reflection or deep understanding of issue(s).

Poor

Writing is difficult to follow and responses to questions are inaccurate or off point. Writer does not demonstrate reflection or understanding of issue(s).

You should also arrange for any accommodations for students with IEPs or other special needs, including providing the means to record answers in ways that don't require writing. Note that the site's Writing Tools allow students to upload drawings, voice recordings, and video.

Activity-Specific Teaching Strategies

Introduction and Starting Point: You Are Here

Students should be able to get through these two pages without much help, but you will want to provide students with an overview of your expectations: which assignments are required and which are optional, due dates, how work will be evaluated, etc. You'll also want to make sure they have access to the site and understand how to use its tools. And remind them that they can view the videos as many times as they need in order to complete assigned tasks, including going back to videos and work they had already completed.

Peanut Butter, Jelly, and Racism – Understanding the Basics

Check student notes for comprehension. If they don't understand the basic concepts, the remainder of the lesson will be difficult to complete. Consider sharing exemplary answers with the entire class.

Peanut Butter, Jelly, and Racism – Identifying Sources

This would be a good place to pause for discussion, allowing students to share with one another the sources of their ideas about race and racism. You may also want to fill in any significant gaps. For example, students may identify obvious information sources, such as newscasts, but they may miss subtle ideas conveyed by media like video games or toys.

You can also use this opportunity to make sure that students are comfortable with the online tools and that no one is being hampered by technical glitches.

Peanut Butter, Jelly, and Racism – Personal Reflection

Though this is an individual exercise, you may want to aggregate everyone's responses and share them with the class. This will give students a picture of the "fog" that swirls around them on a daily basis.

You might also take some time to let students talk about associations that touch them personally. Invite them to reflect on how the associations affect their lives and guide them to see ways that they can use that knowledge to break through those limitations rather than be bound by them.

Check Our Bias to Wreck Our Bias and Check Your Bias to Wreck Your Bias

It will be important to provide students with a chance to talk about their results. Most people believe they aren't biased and are surprised when the test suggests that they are. Be sure that students know that gaining awareness of their biases is a strength, not an indication that they are bad people.

Your Opinion Essay

In school, academic work often emphasizes empirical knowledge while discounting the value of personal experience. But the concept of implicit bias demonstrates the

importance of bridging those two worlds. Guide students to take seriously what they learn about themselves and link their new insights to the factual information they have learned. Taking action is a great way to address the frustration or cynicism that can arise from learning about a persistent problem that hasn't yet been solved, like the negative effects of implicit bias.

Decide what students will be required to do for their final essay and let them know how the essay will be evaluated. Also decide whether or not there will be any formal ways for students to share their essays with one another.

Video: Check Our Bias to Wreck Our Bias & The Life Changing Magic of Hanging Out

The videos suggest that who we hang with – who is in our network of regular social contact – matters. Students whose self-audit suggests that their own networks are homogenous may want to diversify but they may not know how to start. Consider facilitating opportunities, such as [Mix It Up](#) at lunch or other special school projects that can give students a chance to work with people outside of their typical social circle.

This is also the first activity that asks students to summarize the main concept from the video rather than simply take notes and answer questions. You may want to review what makes a good summary prior to this point in the lesson, or do a quick media literacy conversation. Help students link the experience of editing their own summaries to understanding that every news story is also edited (and may leave out information that they think is important).

Possible Lesson Extensions

Introduce students to the phrase “knowledge is power,” including its meaning and its history (used by Thomas Jefferson phrase in his case for the founding of a public university, the University of Virginia, and reputedly coined by Sir Francis Bacon, the nominal “father” of the scientific empirical method still popular today. Invite students to describe how the phrase applies to what they learn about methods to counteract the negative effects of implicit bias.

Assign students to examine one (or more) of the sources cited in the videos and use [media literacy questions](#) to assess the credibility of the source(s).

Work with science faculty to help students evaluate the methods used by one or more of the research studies cited in the videos.

For college prep courses, use the sources referenced in the videos to expose students to college level work:

Video 1: Peanut Butter, Jelly and Racism

Review these definitions from the Perception Institute: <https://perception.org/research/>. Which of the concepts are already familiar and which are new to you?

Read and summarize an article written by Prof. Shaun Harper. Choose from the options here: <https://works.bepress.com/sharper/>.

Video 2: Check Our Bias to Wreck Our Bias

Read [Dolly Chugh's study](#) of professors (referenced in the video). Consider whether you think the video summary of the research was accurate. Was there anything important that the video left out?

Video 3: The Life-Changing Magic of Hanging Out

Read and summarize the actual [college roommate study](#) referenced in the video. Compare your summary to the summary given in the video.

Sources

Glossary definitions included in this lesson are from Merriam-Webster (merriam-webster.com), except for the definition of “implicit bias” which is from the Perception Institute (perception.org).