

Identity Explorer

Lesson Summary:

This lesson asks students to reflect on how identities are constructed, portrayed, and perceived. Students will examine the concepts of visible and invisible identity traits and reflect on how assumptions, stereotypes and biases are formed. When used in conjunction with other Kaur Foundation lessons, this activity introduces the idea the Sikh identity is both highly visible, but is often also very invisible, a reoccurring theme throughout the Sikh experience.

Grade Levels:

3-8

Objectives:

Students will be able to...

- Reflect on the visible and invisible aspects of their own identities;
- Compare and contrast visible and invisible identity traits;
- Describe the role of visible and invisible identity traits in the formation of stereotypes and bias;
- Discuss approaches to overcoming biases based on visible identities.

Guiding Questions:

- What is the difference between visible identity and invisible identity?
- Why is it valuable to learn about other peoples' invisible identities?

Materials:

- Copies of the Identity Explorer worksheet (2-sided student version)
- Drawing supplies such as markers, crayons, colored pencils, etc.

Note: Some of the topics raised in this activity and the discussion questions can be sensitive and personal. Structure the discussion portion of the lesson based on your knowledge of your students and reiterate classroom norms regarding respect and civil dialogue. Provide students with options for completing the activity in ways that do not force them to disclose personal information that they are not comfortable sharing.



Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1

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.

Social Justice Standards (from Learning for Justice)

1. Students will develop positive social identities based on their membership in multiple groups in society (Identity).
7. Students will develop language and knowledge to accurately and respectfully describe how people (including themselves) are both similar to and different from each other and others in their identity groups (Diversity).
11. Students will recognize stereotypes and relate to people as individuals rather than representatives of groups (Justice).

INTRODUCTION

1. Select two books with very different covers, one with little to no cover art (try removing the dust jacket) and one with rich or detailed cover art. If possible, cover the titles of the books so only the illustrations are visible.
2. Display these at the front of the room and ask students to tell you what they think the books are about based only on what they can see on the covers.
3. Reveal the actual topics of the books and ask students to reflect on how accurate their predictions were. What clues did they use to determine the topics of the books? Were their assumptions based on those clues close to the action topics?
4. Draw the connection between the covers of the books and **visible identity** traits.

ACTIVITY

1. Pass out the Identity Explore worksheets and drawing supplies.
2. Give students time to complete the first side of the worksheet: *“Think of yourself as the cover of a book. What would others notice based just on what they can see when they look at you?”*
3. In small groups or a whole class, briefly share some of the visible traits that students included on their book covers.
4. Give students time to complete the second side of the worksheet: *“Think about the contents of your book — what is inside that is not visible on the outside? What important parts of your identity would not be visible on the cover?”*

The prompts include:

- Your values
- Experiences that shaped you
- Plans for the future
- Languages you speak
- Hobbies
- Education
- Family background

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

1. In pairs or small groups, ask students to discuss the first two discussion questions:
 - Compare the inside and outside of your book. What assumptions might people make about you based on what they can see on the cover? Are those assumptions accurate?
 - Are there ways that you (or other people) choose to show or hide parts of your identity based on visible appearance? How and why do you (or other people) choose which aspects of your identity to make visible?
2. In the same groups or as a whole class discussion one or more of these prompts:
 - What happens when we make assumptions based on someone’s outward appearance? Should we ‘judge a book by its cover’? How do you feel when you are judged on appearance alone?
 - How do stereotypes or biases play a role when we judge people based on their outward appearance?

- How are people judged or perceived when they have visible articles of faith or other types of membership?
- How can we make sure that we learn about who people are on the inside, not just who they seem to be on the outside?

Exit Ticket Suggestions:

“Without using names, what was one thing you learned about a classmate today that you did not know before?”

“Given an example of how someone might make an invisible part of their identity visible.” (e.g. support for a cause, membership in a club, religious identity)

“What is an otherwise invisible part of your identity that you make visible in some way? How do you make it visible?”

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

Students respond to one or more of the discussion questions in more depth as a journal entry or reflective essay.

Have students repeat this activity at home with an adult. Ask students to write about an invisible aspect of identity that they learned about their adult that they did not already know.

Select an article of clothing, religious garb, or other items that commonly denotes an aspect of otherwise invisible identities. Do some research to address the following prompts:

- What does this item represent or mean to individuals who wear or display it?
- Find at least three examples of someone wearing or displaying the item.

EXTENSIONS AND MODIFICATIONS:

Interpersonal Communication: After students have drawn the front cover of their own book, ask them to work in pairs to draw the front cover of their partner's book, again based only on visible identity traits. Compare the visible traits that each partner thought important to emphasize. If there are substantial difference between the depictions, prompt students to discuss they had different perceptions of the other person. Complete the inside sections of the book by interviewing each other.

Home-School Connections: Assign students to complete or repeat this activity at home with a family member and reflect on the discussion questions together. (Remote-learning friendly)

Employing Digital Media: Students can use online tools to create collages and/or annotated images for the exterior of the book. A similar collage could be created for the inside pages of the book or students could record an audio or video response for the interior. This format could allow for more detail on both of these sections as well as opportunities for students and the teacher to comment on and discuss specific parts of the visuals in more depth. (Remote-learning friendly)



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